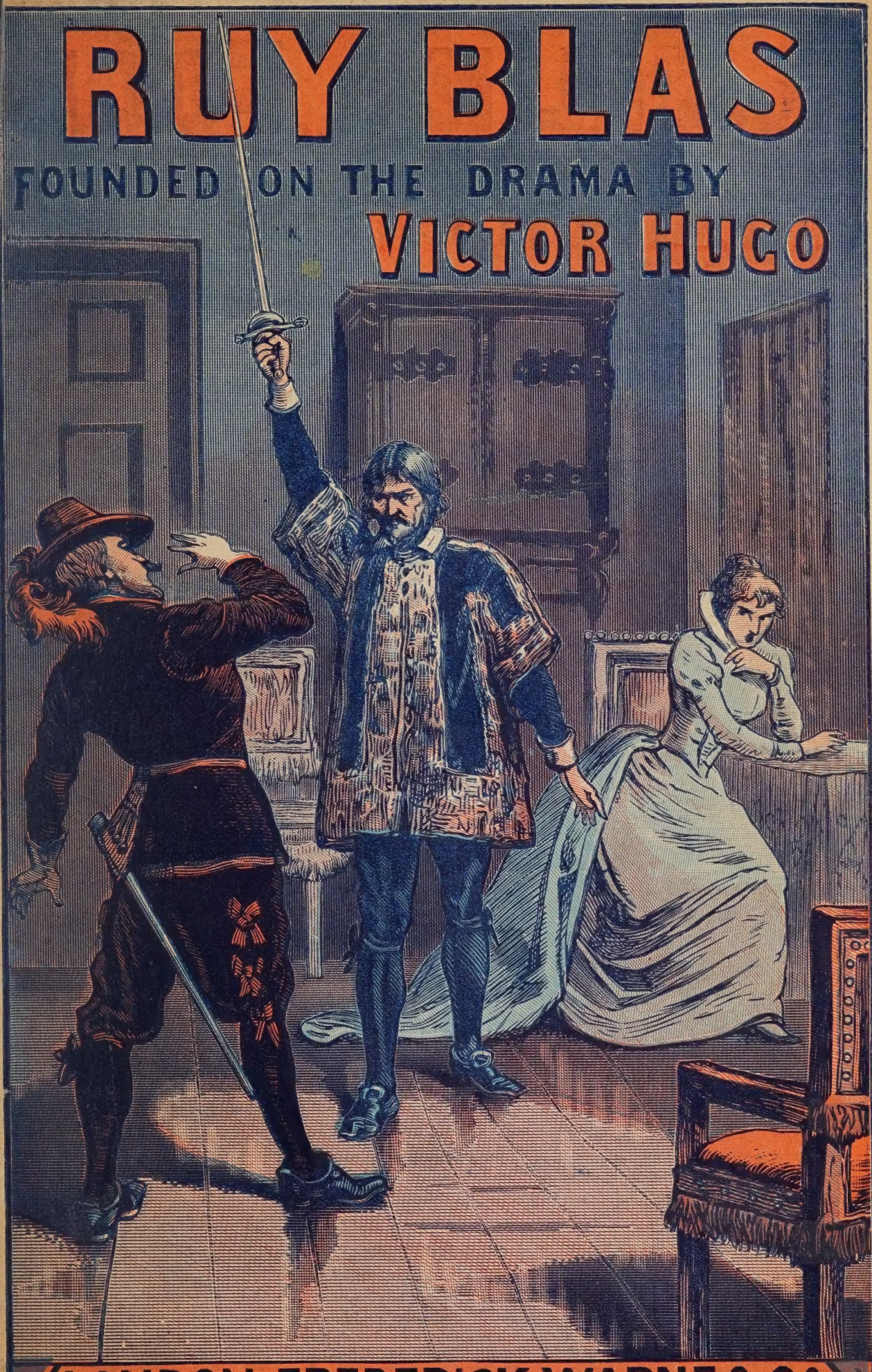
NOTABLE NOVELS.

RUY BLAS

FOUNDED ON THE DRAMA BY

VICTOR HUGO



LONDON: FREDERICK WARNE & Co

MELLIN'S FOOD

FOR INFANTS AND INVALIDS

259 Dalston Lane,
Mare Street, Hackney,
Jan. 13th, 1891.

Dear Sir,

I am proud to hand you a photo of one of my children. This boy was eighteen months old when his photo was taken, and weighed 33 lbs. He is very solid and muscular, and not flabby like most big children. He has been brought up on Mellin's Food, and has always been the picture of health.

Yours truly
W. E. BRADLY.

MELLIN'S FOOD BISCUITS

PALATABLE, DIGESTIVE, NOURISHING, SUSTAINING. Price 2s. and 3s. 6d. per Tin.

MELLIN'S LACTO-GLYCOSE, or MILK FOOD.

Dissolved in warm water is ready for immediate use. Price 2s. and 3s. per Bottle.

SHAKESPERIAN WISDOM ON THE FEEDING AND REARING OF INFANTS.

A Pamphlet of Quotations from Shakespeare, and Portraits of Beautiful Children, together with Testimonials which are of the highest interest to all mothers. To be had, with Samples, free by post on application to

G. MELLIN, Marlboro' Works, Peckham, S.E.

RB 78352

RUY BLAS.

RUY BLAS;

OR,

THE KING'S RIVAL.

A HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

FOUNDED ON THE DRAMA

BY

VICTOR HUGO,

AUTHOR OF

"THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME," "HERNANI," "LES MISÉRABLES,"
"TOILERS OF THE SEA," ETC., ETC.

EDITED BY

H. L. WILLIAMS.

LONDON AND NEW YORK:
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.
1890.

[*All rights reserved.*]

CONTENTS.

PAGE

CHAPTER I.

THE "MUTE" ON THE STRINGS OF JOY - - - - - - - 1

CHAPTER II.

THE CHIEF ATTRACTION - - - - - - - - - - 6

CHAPTER III.

THE JOYOUS ENTRY - - - - - - - - - - 12

CHAPTER IV.

THE FALLEN STAR - - - - - - - - - - 20

CHAPTER V.

THE HONOUR OF THE SCAPEGRACE - - - - - - - 26

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET OF LOVE - - - - - - - - - - 32

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL - - - - - - - - 37

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FORGET-ME-NOT - - - - - - - - - 44

CHAPTER IX.

CROWN OF THORNS - - - - - - - - - - 52

CHAPTER X.

THE TYRANNY OF ETIQUETTE. - - - - - - - - 59

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE WILL OUT - - - - - - - - - - - 66

CHAPTER XII.

THE THANKLESS DEFENCE - - - - - - - - - 71

CHAPTER XIII.

"WELL ROARED, LION!" - - - - - - - - - 76

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CROWNING PRIZE - - - - - - - - - - 84

CHAPTER XV.

SMOKE SMOTHERS THE FLAMBEAU - - - - - - - - 87

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COUNTER TRICK - - - - - - - - - - 94

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BLACK SHEEP - - - - - - - - - - 99

CHAPTER XVIII.

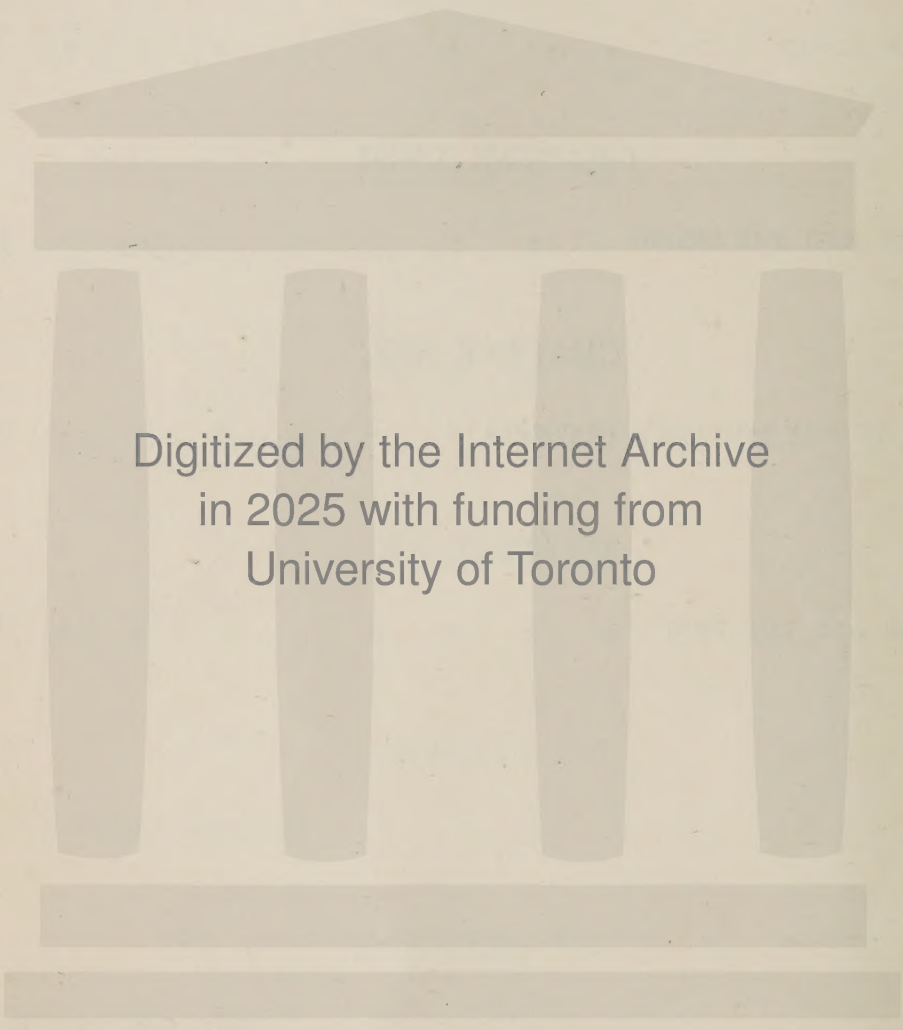
THE HEART AND THE SWORD - - - - - - - - 107

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DAW IN THE PEACOCK'S FEATHERS - - - - - - 111

CHAPTER XX.

THE TIGER AND THE LION - - - - - - - - 114


Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
University of Toronto

https://archive.org/details/ruyblasorkingsri00will

RUY BLAS;

OR,

THE KING'S RIVAL.

CHAPTER I.

THE "MUTE" ON THE STRINGS OF JOY.

THE month of May in the year of grace 1690 was approaching its end when the scattered goats and sheep on the plains surrounding Madrid were startled by the unwonted crowds that suddenly peopled the solitude. Along the roads and pathways that stretched around the city like the lines in a huge spider's web, came numbers of pedestrians and carriages: the idle, the pleasure loving, and the dishonest mingled with the industrious and honest. Over the level ground, below the tableland on the hill, where buildings clustered—plains scorched in summer and snow-covered in winter, but now carpeted with grass and tufted with broom—flocked the peasants and gentry, on foot and in clumsy ox-carts, as rude as those their forefathers, the Goths, employed, and out-screaming the eagle in the mountain passes with their ungreased, solid, wooden wheels. And this time, the old Spanish gaiety appeared unveiled, for under the gravity assumed before strangers these were the merriest people in the universe.

It could not be the great local festival of San Isidro, patron of both peasants and Madrid, for that had occurred on the fifteenth of the month; and, indeed, there was a liveliness in all faces incompatible even with the not always pious demonstration of the *romerias*, or "rosemaryings," when the sojourners at the hermitages without the town returned home with sprigs of the fragrant heather in their hats or tresses, to prove that they had been really in the country.

The mourning emblems for the loss of the Queen-Consort, Louise of France, first wife of Don Carlos II., had not long been taken down before his second marriage was announced. All the long and not-to-be-hurried ceremonies of espousal had been at length concluded, and the Castilians were told by criers at the market places, where the Madrid *Gazette* was read, that three days' feasting would celebrate the reception in the capital of the new partner of the joys—and woes, a more notable item—of the still great sovereign.

True, the finances were out of order; industry was paralyzed; the treasury was exhausted; the English buccaneers played havoc with the Silver Fleet, and the arms of Spain were disgraced as well near home as abroad, but the invitation to the revels was accepted without a dissentient voice.

The mill sails were folded, and the

arms, rarely at rest, reposed as if the heat oppressed them; down on the Manzanares, swollen by the spring floods, the washerwomen had abandoned their hovels, ranged along the shore beyond the fruit gardens of the priestly houses, where the pink and the white blossoms offered posies to the cloudless sky; scarcely, here and there, some purblind and wholly deaf hag (perhaps not having understood why a general holiday was taken), went on methodically beating and shaking out the linen so that the pieces vaguely seemed the wings of swans angrily flapping before an encounter.

On the ways that led into the highway to the Segovia Bridge, the throng augmented and became more and more tumultuous, although the people were so sober that there was not a sharper insult than to call a man a drunkard; the excitement of the unprecedented gala elevated all souls, and peals of laughter interrupted every moment the songs and choruses of the families in the road or on the carts. Amid all, the boys and girls glided like lost needles in a bunch of tow, elbowing, whistling, shouting in a piercing treble (in direct contrast to the guttural voice of the farm labourers and mountaineers), and capering like goats.

Nothing quieted them, although a kind of transient hush fell on the crowd as there came, with difficulty through the press, the brightly caparisoned mule of a *rico hombre*, or man of distinction; the jennet of a church dignitary, or the cumbrous glass coach of a nobleman, each with a retinue in new liveries. There would be some remonstrance, an oath, a stern command, the whistling of a gilt-headed Malacca cane in a resplendent running-footman's grasp, and the parry of it by a cudgel; then a laugh, the rustic waggon would be drawn, reluctantly squeaking, to one side, where the ditchwater was stirred up and emitted the strong odour of decaying weeds; the grandee would roll on, only to meet with another such stoppage a little later, which the same begrudged respect and unstinted good-humour allowed to be overcome.

When we say there was no dissentient voice, we are not altogether correct. In the thick of the sightseers, which was greater than at any former period, there was one memorable note of discordance, or a mute on the chords of this viol of joy.

In the same way as the old palace of an unknown dynasty contributed towards making the holy refuge, it had given blocks of granite to the instrument of justice, and if, peradventure, a slab from a royal throne was here, it was layered in between others of a funereal origin.

A young man sat on one which jutted out, and between his feet a sharp eye could read, in the good Latin of the Dark Ages, when little else was perfect—

"O pious wayfarer, one who is miserably dead implores thy succour!"

Commonly, the defunct are made to counsel; this one was let speak his sentiment, and he implored a prayer. At the first glance, it seemed to be rightly directed to the youth who had but to cast his eyes down to read it in its inverted position, for he wore a black cassock, which, though curtailed because its unravelled hem had too much resembled "the beggar's fringe," denoted some connection with a religious fraternity. He had no sword, and his weapon, a book, though not a breviary (being, as a tarnished gilt lettering indicated, only Daulphin's "Paranymph Sacré de la Solitude"), was sufficiently devotional to bear out the belief. But this tall, slender, and supple figure, seated so carelessly and proof

to the unalloyed mirth, was not inclined to prayer by education or taste. He was not a priest novitiate, but a beggar student—a foundling whom chance had placed in the donation-box of the College of Saint Benedict, rather than the cradle receptacle of the Foundlings. The popular saying that the nameless child may be the offspring of a noble, and so rank higher than a known beggar's brat, had befriended him.

Ruy Blas had been brought up by the Benedictines as a scholar. It was a school of science—and arrogance—for the followers of Bennet had ruled the Empire. It was a sad favour to the son of nobody! Cast among the plebeian foundlings, he would have been taught a trade or a calling, and, instead of dreaming in the siesta, he would have been grafting apricots in the monastery garden, or shaping wood in the carpenter's shop.

At the outer end of the bridge, in an accursed spot where often the heretics were burnt, and where on a stone wheel the lesser guiltiness was broken in every limb, stood the Hermitage of the Guardian Angel. Guarding in particular—what? The bridge—object of the unappeasable ire of the storms and waters? The town?—the river?—which needed heavenly interposition in hot summers, when it disappeared almost altogether — thanks to the ravages upon the once well wooded slopes by the mania for clearing—that wasteful outcome of civilization. At all events, the Hermitage of *el Angel della Guardia*, constructed of stones torn from a palatial edifice, of which no story clung to the ruins, fronted the place of execution. Its statue, in Nevada marble, yellowed by time and pitted by the abrasion of sand from the plains in the November gales, stood on a pyramid aloof from the chapel, and at its feet, again, were the wheel and pillory in one.

His countenance was beautiful spite of the shallow grooves of poverty, unsatisfied longings, the want of appreciation, of sympathy and encouragement, and the pursuit without overtaking it of the chimera which every son of Adam has to follow as surely as his shadow follows him. It was enframed in long black hair; it had a sallow tinge and a hollowness of cheek, but it was of the prolonged oval shape, accounted the model of beauty by fashion and art in the fifteenth century. A small head was now in vogue, and it is singular that in a generation a type can be arbitrarily attained. This man, then, if conjecture might frame a theory on the missing clue to his parentage, might be descendant of a titled free-lance or of a charlatan, of a prince worthy of his crown or of a monastic reformer. At present, he brooded in that profound abstraction of the chrysalis: when he emerged he would act, he would devour and destroy!

This was not so much Marius meditating as one of those lazzaroni who spend the whole day in the shade of a palace portico, overflowing with riches, watching the bejewelled ladies go in and come out, idling; but, when the emergency arises, taking the lead in revolution and expelling even the king from his throne.

Meanwhile, his head, full of the vague, sweet and sad ideas felt by all men in the sunset of days and by a choice few in the dawn of life, was the butt of sarcasms from the livelier passers-by. They bantered him about his worn shoes, his untied garters, which let the hose form ridges up the thin yet sinewy legs; the cassock, lustrous with wear and grease; and the felt hat, which (not to mince matters) might have been matched from a scarecrow's

melon-head, till the trees of the Hermitage and roadside leaned towards each other and repeated the jests, shivering with the sibillant laugh of satyrs.

The jokers bade him beware of dozing where Matalobos, "the Wolf-slayer," and famous robber of Galicia, might covet his wardrobe, and do him to death with blows of a long sausage of sand (an ingenious weapon by which the reformer of the Mint had lately been beaten into a fever, of which he died, albeit there was not a bruise upon him). Another cautioned him against the bramble, that serpent of vegetation, which was creeping up his ankle and would deservedly strangle a block of humanity so insensible to all that a man and loyal subject should be interested in as to nap when the "Pearl of Bavaria" was expected from the fogs of Germany within the sunshine of Spain.

"If you are in love, come, behold her, and the other beauties—the maids of honour—and your flame will be rekindled, and you will return to your sweetheart," they cried.

Still the poor student, with his finger in his book to mark the place where a meditation on the fate of mankind had been inspired, let the stream flow by, like an epitome of the Procession of Humanity which Lucian reviewed. To the rude jest, the creaking of the wheel, the dances of the mountebanks, the thunder of the patrician's coach, he was equally as heedless, and hardly lifted his eyes on the *cortège* of vintagers guarding a triumphal car of Galician wine, to figure in the trades' and guilds' reception. They directed their song maliciously at him, with the idea that they guessed the secret of his rapt state:—

"Oh, where in the woodland
Are birds to rejoice?
The sweetest of singers
I hear in thy voice!

"If the storm-cloud eclipses
The stars in the skies,
Far brighter ones spangle
The blue of thine eyes

"In April the blossoms
On all sides may start—
The fairest of flowers
Blooms e'er in thy heart.

"That bird, sweetest singing,
Those stars seen in days,
That flower of feeling—
They're Love—King always!"

"Love, love, is always the King, and I am his leal subject," cried loudly one of the train, and, leaving his companions, he leaped the narrow strip of grass, half ground out by the dust, before the horizontal wheel, and stood before the spoil-sport who mocked at thousands by his melancholy.

"Send me a short life but a merry," he continued, changing his note, and dropping his hand, which he had lifted half belligerently; "it is a friend—corrected by 'a brother'! my brother. Ruy!"

"Zafari!"

They clasped hands with unmistakable cordiality, and gave one another the embrace of knight companions. On the surface one would take them for knights expelled from the order, for the sorry condition of the new-comer's apparel assorted well with that of the charity scholar. A faded and worn pink doublet covered a vest of superior material and in a less illtreated state, which showed itself by peeps through the unintended slashes of the outer garment; the trunks were tattered and were as incapable of holding long together as of holding up the ungartered hose. Here and there, out of gaps, protruded tags of yellowed lace and frayed ribbons. Over the whole, though far from covering the shame of tailors, hung a threadbare cape, its primitive colours beyond tracing, almost reduced to tinder by the sun and rain, and moaning its wretchedness by a number of mouths, ragged and rusty

red. Its saw-toothed hem came down upon a long rapier of the best Old Toledo work, which beat against his calves and the run-down heels of riding-boots, which had been trimmed into shoes, since the owner had renounced the luxury of riding, by a cut or two of the knife on the decayed uppers.

Nevertheless, in this adventurer, who strongly resembled Ruy Blas in figure and face, the beggarliness was carried off by an arrogance which the proud Braganza would not have spurned. He held his head high, and his eye was on the alert for a sneer at his Job-like rags. Zafari would have suited the pencil of Jacques Callot, from his grey felt hat, with the enormous and perforated brim, to the cut-down boot-shoes; but as his muscular yet elegant hand closed on the steel pineapple pommel of his long sword, not one for parade, a judicious observer must needs have acknowledged that this man was no degenerate son of the Cid.

CHAPTER II.

THE CHIEF ATTRACTION.

"GREETING, king of my heart's heart," resumed this chivalric mountebank, "what are you puzzling your brain with at the present moment of jubilee? Great zealot for the Faith, have we the penitential psalms here, or 'The Story of the Hapless Amour of Gianfiore and the Fair Filomena'? for, although you would be disdainful even of the charms and ogling of the Portuguese dancing-girls of the Puerta del Sol, you are, at the core, as amorous a cub as ever climbed the tree of the forbidden fruit which, luckily, is never forbidding! Are you bitten by a basilisk? for the crones say that a monstrous venomous beast is hatched out of the clots of a heretic's blood; and here you sit where they flog the unbeliever to the last gasp! Or have you been bitten by a cockatrice? The wheel on which they break felons, as the fat cook of the 'Golden Gridiron' breaks tough fillets, is the proper warming-pan of cockatrices, or I have no soul to be saved! Extinguish them by prayer, as did Saint Leon. You see, I have not forgotten my lore. You, though you were not blessed with as full a library as my father set before me, in that of your Benedictines, yet made better use of the pasties whose crusts are leather and the contents leaves. Precious dry leaves! Come, let us get the taste out of your mouth at the fountain at the head of the Vintners' Street. Disbelieve it who would, but I have it on the word and honour of José the Twisted, privileged beggar at the outdoor shrine of the African Virgin, that the fountain this day and two yet to come will no more cease spouting the finest Ribadaira wine than your chief, the Reverend Archbishop Raimondo, will cease saying blessings on the Star of Neuburg for a month. Free wine as a fountain," ran on the gay gallant in rags, shaking his discoloured and entangled plumes. "I have not seen it since (not to be delicate) I was released from prison, when, in thanks for his recovery from being bewitched, our magnanimous monarch ordered a general gaol delivery. It's true that he has tried to rescind the boon, but I was out betimes. Ah, they say his digestion is faulty; poor, august Emperor! Methinks that a king who can swallow a decree can digest an elephant. But come," he said, forcing the silent one to rise by tucking him under his arm familiarly, "the odour of the burnt ground and of the pillory offends my nostrils. Talking of elephants"—as he led his enforced companion to the highway—"they could not provide one for the show to our German visitor, since the Algerines—your Algerine being deficient in gallantry beyond any blackguard of my acquaintance—captured the ship that was bringing it to the Company of the Indies. To make weight, they have a girl and a giantess from Mexico, and two alligators, a species of dragon—but there you may out of your learning correct me. What! not a smile yet? Verily,

verily, Ruy, son of Blas, or, rather, of some king unnamed, for I uphold it you are a princely fellow, else good blood doth lie! We may resemble to the point of being taken for one another, by which token I recall your incarceration for me in the guardhouse of the Corregidor-mayor, whom the foul fiend toast! But the likeness is only external; you have not my jolly soul! Yet, you were light as the thistle-down once. We have sung all day long, from the first kiss of Aurora into the eventide, when the Heavenly Father and Host offered us the doorless and roofless best room in the hostelry of the Sierra. We shared everything then! Brother, let me share your sadness; the burden will be lightened."

"After four years, the same joyous spirit!" sighed Ruy; but he allowed himself to trudge beside the buoyant Zafari, in the dust, among the throng, becoming one scale more of the endless serpent which wound up the hill; crossing the Manzanares, into the town, where barriers took the place of the tower gates, which fortified and walled cities would have shown. "Free as a gipsy! rich in your poverty! who never owned a single thing——"

"And wishes for less!" added the adventurer, turning up his long moustache, and waving his hand out of the fluttering sleeve to a dame of his acquaintance, who had accepted a lift from a water-carrier, and was perched on a barrel, so as to show more of a stocking undarned than self-respect warranted, but not too much of a shapely ankle for the connoisseurs of Zafari's quality to disapprove. "Mark the rustic wench who goes to contest the palm for beauty with the native *Manolas*. I honour her courage! Ruy, will you maintain the supremacy of your ladylove at the cane-play or the cudgels? The prize is a capful of silver pieces—the good ancient pillar dollar of the days before they debased the coinage, and made even a dearth of the fraudulent ones."

"Man, I am not in love!"

"Then, why do you walk the roads, steeped in meditation, like the peripatetic philosophers? or worse, loll on the pillory? Not in love? I can remember you tossing your thoughts and your vows to the sky in insensate strophes! I opposed my laughter to your hundred adjectives to the idol!"

"It was an ideal! I have never met the woman that I could love."

"It is the same with me," said Zafari, suddenly relapsing into gravity.

"I have felt—I still feel—ambition, not love!" continued the student, with a fiery eye, and starting into a swifter pace. "But I aimed too high—too far. I feared the goal was inaccessible, and I asked myself where was the good in working?"

"That is what I say!"

"Then, however, I believed in myself—in my genius. I was but twenty — everything seemed real, and all imaginations possible. I hoped everything from Fate!"

"And no *fête* responded! Ha, ha!"

"I built plans upon plans, till my projects piled up into a mountain. One day I endeavoured to scale it—to stand on the pinnacle—and——"

"Down came the house of cards, and you were buried under the knaves and queens. It needs not the soothsayer of the *Calle Mayor* to read these riddles. But we are out of our twentieth year at last, and men for a venture. What say you to a means of replenishing our purses after the festa? Look at the spoil of these hard hearted Egyptians,

who prance by on barbs and in Flemish coaches. Matalobos, the robber, who desolated the town and suburbs, in spite of the watch, is a friend of mine! We propose waylaying Don Pedro Merino, on his return home by the Burnt Mill Road—fine fat sheep, if his name be of good augury. And we shall discover, also, if the *Juez de Aguas*, the water-tester who, look you! knows a good drop of wine, has not a purse well garnished."

"Join you in robbery?"

"These are nobility of recent creation—not hallowed and pre-ordained exactors, and we who are impoverished by their extortions only take back a portion of our own. I say this to remove your scruples. I am entitled—though the reason is neither here nor there—to meet and wrest from the nobles of the ancient line the matter for my support. A Zafari must not die in a ditch whilst a Medina-Cœli or any Oropeso waxes fat! Let that pass. In two words, will you take a purse with us at the end of the three days' junketting?"

"Brother, brother, the gibbet awaits such tempters as you."

"Brother, brother, the gibbet is made of the same wood as the throne; and meseems, though I play the pendulum to the great clock of Nature, which dullards call the world, I ought to be as happy as the phantom who sits in the chair of Philip, the son of Philip, the son of the great Charles!"

"Peace! we are at the barrier, and your conversation is not suited to the ears of the alguazils."

"There you speak a wise speech," said the wary Zafari, who, without abating his provoking carriage, changed the tenor of his talk as he passed beneath an arch adorned with a shield of the arms of the city, a bear in a tree of fruit, and through a double row of halberdiers and arquebusiers in the Madrid colours of scarlet and sable.

The town was arbitrarily built, and could hardly have been on a site less convenient; but at this moment it was neither so wet that the earth was converted into mud, nor so dry that dust choked the multitudinous foot passengers. The streets were on ordinary occasions dirty, but the ruts in the unpaved ground were filled up, and the putting forth of decorations on the face of nearly every habitation repressed the daily practice of casting garbage and foul water out of window to the traditional cry of "*Agua!*" All European towns were thus afflicted at this period, so that the two visitors did not blame the authorities for the state of the side streets, since wonders had been done in the principal ones to impress the bride of Spain with an idea of Madrid's magnificence.

The oldest houses were in the Moorish style and but two stories high, with flat roofs; the next in age were more ornamental and rejoiced in wooden surmounting floors; lastly, in the main avenue and the grand square, or Plaza Mayor, there were buildings with four or even five floors, with handsome balconies, triumphs of the joiner and decorative smith. These were draped with tapestries of price, and banners and the coats of arms of the noble families were hung prominently on the façades.

It was the custom for each craft to occupy a street of its own, and at the mouths of these ducts into the great artery were arranged specimens of their handiwork upon stages and in piles. As Zafari had been informed by the very competent judge of good liquor, there were fountains which ran wine.

Arm-in-arm the student and the vagabond followed the throng which, entering at the Prado barrier, pro-

ceeded up the long and tolerably broad way to the farther end, and then returned on the opposite side; those who found a suitable lodgment for themselves where the servants and tenants of the nobles did not occupy the portals, dropping out of the ranks, which, however, showed no perceptible diminution.

The pair paid the due tribute of respect to the American "cocodrille," lodged in a barred tank in the built-up "Temple of Montezuma," before the Indian Council house, in an architecture designed in Spain on, perhaps, insufficient data; pictures and effigies decked the doorways of the Guilds — that of the Furriers being notable for a display of stuffed animals, among which, for the delectation of the students of Pliny and Aristotle, were sundry artificial hybrids—such as mermen, angel fish, seahorses, unicorns, and the like — which caused our student to smile, half deceived, half dubious. Angels in metal were suspended by ropes of flowers and leaves across the way, and other gilded and painted statues represented patron saints and personifications of the Virtues and Graces, which must have tasked not only the native talent, but the artists of Italy and the Netherlands, who had been allured hither during the reigns of the Philips.

"Here he is!" ejaculated Zafari, all at once, "just where I might have expected him to be! They say this exhibition is worth fifteen millions of crowns!"

However accurate that valuation, it must be confessed that at the top of the Goldsmiths' street there was the most gorgeous display of any craft, and dazzling to the eye. On a platform, pyramids had been reared with plate and gems, gleaming and glistering, with an enormous imperial eagle, in enamel and precious stones, fluttering over the whole, and carrying a pearl-edged streamer, on which, in burnished golden letters, might be read—

"Hail! Dove in the Eagle's nest!"

"Fifteen millions!" repeated Zafari; "no wonder is to me, Ruy, that you are spellbound!"

At his loud exclamation, a man who had been staring like a cockney at the superb tower of plate, turned his head and recognized him with a smile and a salute.

Tall and well-made, with his jet black hair carefully curled, he was remarkable, even if his costume had not directed attention to him. It was composed of the city colours, but differently arranged than in the town archer's uniform. His was a coat of leather, boiled to blackness, and tough enough to turn a Milanese stiletto; it had black velvet sleeves, cut full, and not unlikely to have been taken from a duchess's mantle; his shoes were black; the scarlet cloth of his breeches was the finest that the looms of the Netherlands supplied, and the lace that adorned them was real gold. He had rose-coloured silk stockings, embroidered with a rose on one calf with the motto, "For my Fair," and on the other a dagger of mercy with the motto, "For my Foe." A cap of striped gold and silver cloth was placed jauntily over one ear, and, to support the insolent and defiant air it gave him, he carried a hunting knife, quite two feet long, and a brace of pistols in a velvet girdle; but for his bearing of uncontrolled independence, he might have been thought an armed retainer of one of those nobles who, disapproving of the luxurious and effeminate life at the Court, lived in the mountains like wolves or the robber-barons of the North.

"It is Matalobos," whispered Zafari to his companion; "though it is the secret of Pulcinella! Mark

how yonder *Portero* of the Alguazil Mayor winks to the goldsmith's 'prentices. Faith, they know the Terror of the Plains right well!"

The *Salteador* came over to salute his friend's friend with the inborn grace of a Castilian, though he was but a mountaineer. The presence of the stranger, however completely vouched for, checked his outburst of admiration over the goldsmiths' show.

"Fifteen millions," observed the adventurer, once more. "Why, the lady will have to confess that we have outshone the jewellers of Nuremberg; and the Dusseldorf treasures would be but a pedlar's case of gewgaws beside this!"

"Hist!" whispered Matalobos. "I have it on certain authority that the old fop the Count of Alba, who fouls the air of the Sierra with his musk and amber every time he passes over, will go home by the northern road. Are you the man to make one of the party? By my faith! it is your bounden duty to rob him, since he decoyed away your Lucinda, the oil jar potter's daughter, and he goes about saying he has had all the world of trouble to teach her good language! Come, come, my dear Zafari, they may impeach you for idleness and non-avoidance of too much malvoisie, but, hang me here and now! you speak Castilian like the preaching friar of the Picture of St. Luke, or I know not the tongue."

"Friend and comrade, look upon the fowl as plucked!" answered Zafari; "but tarry till I return. We have yet the Plaza Mayor to see."

"I am content to fill my eye with this," returned the bandit, fastening his gaze greedily once more on the treasure of the Goldsmiths' Guild.

At the mouth of the street leading into the market place, some guiding spirit, with forethought, had hung German pictures in compliment to the guest, but the square itself was perfectly Spanish in its decorations. All the high buildings were hung with tapestries, and the many balconies would soon be thronged with the nobility. Some order was maintained by the servants of the officers of state and by the town guard and royal halberdiers, who had had their accoutrements renewed and well polished, gilt and cut steel buttons glittering on their coats of that tint of pale snuff brown there called "London bread."

All was excitement as the coaches deposited ladies and lords at the low, deep doors, or were driven into the yards, full of domestics in brushed-up coats or a change of livery for each day. The peers who had been rebellious in a previous age, at last were slavish courtiers.

One of the finest mansions was the centre of all attention, as it was that of the Count of Oñate; where the Queen-mother, pocketing for the time any resentment against the successor of the wife whom she was suspected of having poisoned, was to welcome the Princess in company with the King. Nor at that crime was this lady's veneficial knowledge popularly supposed to stop; Don Juan of Austria had been her steadfast opponent—and he had died unnaturally soon.

The balconies were yet untenanted; but the lowlier guests and servants loaded the roofs. In the shadow of the lowest balcony that resembled a large iron cage, a shadow deepened by that which was cast by the hangings—*i.e.*, a man in a black mantle and with his black felt hat pulled low down over his face, drew a glance from the vigilant Zafari.

"See the poniard of the Old Queen," he muttered. "There is the ruling power, Ruy! Yes, under

that sombrero is the head of the realm—the successor of Lerma and Olivarez! the Marquis of Finlas."

"The Marquis of Finlas," reiterated Ruy Blas, leaning forward to get a closer look at the favourite of the Queen-mother and Secretary of the State.

But at this very juncture, the placid air was rent by a discharge of artillery at the town exit, and voices on all sides cried out—

"The Queen! the Queen! long life to the Queen!"

And the populace surging to and fro, separated the two young men, like the sea scattering a fleet.

CHAPTER III.

THE JOYOUS ENTRY.

By the time the two young men had severally extricated themselves from the crush, Zafari found himself at the head of the Goldsmiths' Street and hastened to address the highwayman; while the student, jammed into the momentarily vacated doorway of the "Bakers' House," panted for breath and looked around in vain for his comrade. It was not possible for him to begin a search for him, since the archers, recovering from their surprise, began to expand from the middle of the square and bear back the concourse; the servants retired into their doorways or courtyards, and the country folk and homeless citizens packed themselves around the place as best they might.

Ruy Blas resigned himself to stay whence flight was not easy, and since he had been led to look on, he resolved to play the spectator conscientiously. A sage in his study, frequently the philosopher is but a moon-calf in the world when suddenly thrown into it. But it is but justice to admit that Ruy's resignation was speedily and amply repaid.

Whilst the reverberation of three hundred cannon shook the pennants and banderoles and vied with the cheering — that cannonade of the people—the blare of trumpets was heard.

At this signal, the balconies began to be tenanted, and the preparations for the Queen-Mother and the King to appear on the one opposite to the site of Ruy's compulsorily chosen observatory, began to be completed by richly bedizened functionaries and domestics, for once whipped up into a briskness not habitual in attendants of the royal family. Philosopher though he was, the poor scholar could not altogether repel the curiosity of the sightseer, and he congratulated himself on having secured an enviable post for viewing the pageant. Here the distinguished guest would be received by her bridegroom, or, rather, her husband, since she had been formally married by proxy.

The man in black, under the portico of the Count of Oñate's, had disappeared, and without knowing whence his sudden instinct of repugnance, Ruy felt that if the Secretary's crushed form, like that of a beetle, had been carried out of the crowd (as several fainting females were being treated) he would not have grieved.

But the salvoes continued, and tuck of drum and *fanfares* of the clarions rose so noisily and with so much contagious exhilaration, that Ruy allowed himself to become one with the thousands and let the transient dislike die out.

In the interval, the Queen-consort, Maria Anna, of Platz-Neuburg, daughter of the late Elector Palatine, after months of voyages and travels before her arrival in her adopted country, was being received by the town authorities, who placed a rich canopy over her whilst she was hearing an address of homage from young ladies personating the Rivers of Spain, and

on whom she did not, by any manifestation of impatience, throw the cold water which—to judge by reading the panegyric of our day—would have been the appropriate tribute.

"By the bones of my ancestors," cried Zafari, as the expected one came along on her horse, covered with gaudy housings, and stepping as if proud of the fair, blue-eyed German, "she is a beauty of the beauties! She bears herself like a princess, too! Now, the last wife, though a proud Frenchwoman, had a dash of that timidity you will see in a rabbit that takes dainties with a premonition that it is being fatted for killing!"

"A lily!" said Matalobos, similarly enthusiastic; "ah, only let me hear of their poisoning *her* with their magical chocolate, and——"

He made the gesture of cutting off ears by passing his forefinger round his own.

The hearty cheer which ran before the procession told the bystanders in the square that the welcome was sincere. The head of the train began to force its way in at the gorged inlet of the Plaza; there was some confusion among the alcades, encumbered with new robes; sergeants and justices, maces and chains, became entangled.

"Unlock your legs!" shouted Zafari, "ye *capitans reformado* stand in need of reformation altogether! You will throw down my lord of Castriglio, who, in quality of Admiral of the Oceans, is sufficiently embarrassed as it is, on the back of a horse!"

Amid some laughter at the sally and screams from the women, the steed in question backed into a platform, on which the Council of the Colonies had arranged a tableau of hiring allegorical figures, and kicked away at the standards with that obstinacy to distinguish itself to disadvantage not unseldom noticed in an animal introduced into a public ceremony.

A crash, a shout, and great alarm arose in the square, where the disaster was not visible.

"What is the matter?" cried Ruy, standing on tip-toe, with an uneasiness not often felt by the generality in those callous communities. "Is there a mishap to her—the Queen?"

"Heaven forbid!" said an old merchant; "I have dealings with Germany, and if she died here, they would not buy currants and prunes."

But at the next instant, the reassuring intelligence ran along from lip to lip.

"A scaffolding fell—only a little Indian girl was hurt, and slightly. The Queen, out of her good heart—for this was not in the *Gazette* as order of the day—has adopted her. Long live the Queen!"

Over the way, on the balcony, preceded by officials of both sexes and high rank, the Queen-mother and King Carlos Segundo strode forth, and, in their undisguised eagerness, only stopped at the parapet.

A strange, double thrill fell on the entire assemblage and chilled it after the first agitation. Ruy looked up, and, notwithstanding his young blood, the heat of the sunshine and his expectancy, experienced the same emotion.

The old Queen was supported, so to say, by her confessor and an officer of the Holy Inquisition, on whose scarlet coat gleamed the terrible drawn sword in the martyr's wreath of laurel. She, they said, used not the sword, but the laurel water to "remove" enemies. Nobody openly accused her, though her power was on the wane, though they said she was not sufficiently surprised at the news of the death of her daughter-in-law, Louise. But

this victim was a Frenchwoman, a foreigner, and it was not the suspicion of this crime, but of causing the taking off of Don Juan, which embittered Ruy and the mob against her.

In a damning silence, they let her take her place, not even the officials cheering. Aged rather than old, depressed by remorse or guilt, or sorrow at being unjustly suspected, rather than bent by senility, her attitude would have elicited commiseration in those who know the temptation around the exalted, but for her proud and contemptuous gaze. Everybody knew that she hated the Spaniards in general, and the Madrid people in particular, and her sixty years commanded not even cold respect.

As for the second foremost figure, it was not a king—not even a man—it was a shade. The offspring of the old age of Philip IV., the last scion of exhausted Austria, weak from birth, and less and less capable of reigning every day, as the slow but unchecked progress of ossification of his heart went on, this living skeleton, turning entirely into bone, was but the monstrosity in the caravan of kings. They had not even dressed him fitly for his part, but clad his thin body in a close fitting rosy pearl paragon coat, and narrowed a forehead which was intellectually enough developed, by bringing the lank fair hair down on the sides of it; his pale blue eyes seemed to have not caught a sparkle from the unquenchable brilliancy superabundant in the square. He looked down on the people who did him the courtesy to cry "Long life," like one just awakened, but not sufficiently so to be astonished.

"Alas!" thought Ruy, "he is not even the hero of the decadence! Yes, shout 'Life!' but all your joy cannot rise commensurate with the grief our King raises in this heart of mine!"

There was no time for grief here. A deafening outcry overpowered the musical instruments, and all eyes, even to those of the Queen-mother, were bent in the same direction. A sea of gold, jewels, steel and silk, burst into the square and carried, like a Venus in her shell under a magnified nautilus sail, the German flower, beneath the embroidered canopy. The waves were the knights and nobles in their coats of cloth-of-gold; the soldiers and guards, the maids of honour, dignitaries, and the town's officers.

A perfect type of the Teutonic beauty, and hence the more calculated to surprise the Southerners, educated to admire the eyes of jet and the raven tresses, the ruby lip and the sunburnt cheek, Maria Anna of Neuburg astonished as much as she charmed.

Recovering after the surprise from which he was not exempt, the King abruptly saluted her, and turning round with the precision of an automatic figure and giving his hand to his mother and a nod to the Countess of Oñate, who had lent her palace for this part of the ceremony, he vanished from the balcony. It seemed to Ruy that thus the passionless Pharoahs walked away from the people into their palaces, which were but colossal sarcophagi.

All perceived that the newcomer had taken this disappearance for an expression of disdain, though the King was but going round by the backway to the Royal Palace for the state reception; *this* was the welcome to the town, but etiquette locked all lips and fettered all limbs.

In the midst of the dismay, the Queen looked up as if for a cue, a word, a look even, to terminate her amazement, that was becoming trepidation.

A young and indignant voice broke the silence:—

"Be of good cheer, august lady! you are Madrid's beloved now, and all Spain's!"

And acclamation from every corner of the square, from the street to the thronged roofs, denoted that the multitude had found a spokesman.

Involuntarily, the Queen looked in the direction of the voice, but she was not sure that she distinguished any speaker; still it seemed to Ruy that into his eyes her glance had been poured, without her singling him out.

Urceus exit, the vase knows nothing of the balm which it distributes. Then, smiling as if she divined the meaning of the encouragement, although she was still unfamiliar with the language, she accepted the elaborate explanation of the Lord Chamberlain and, bowing graciously, let herself be conducted to the palace.

Here the King received her, but on the same footing this time, and a great mass of the nobles and their wives and daughters beset the royal couple on the way to the banquet, and thence to the ballroom. It had been kept secret, as a surprise to the bridegroom, that the German princess had been made proficient in one or two Spanish dances. In the saraband she acquitted herself so well that the apathetic sovereign unbent and declared—

"Oh, *mi Reyna!* you are the perfection of the world!" which, in him, was eloquence.

Seated in the balcony beside him, after dark, to see the unparalleled spectacle of two bulls, garnished with fireworks, which, set loose amid the coruscations of the pyrotechnical display, ran about the arena of the Plaza Mayor, and thence into an artificial pond, on which they were hunted by torchlight, all the while "horribly excited," says the chronicler, the bride listened idly to the music from Lulli's "Armide," which the King, although he detested everything French, had expressly commanded. Suddenly she heard, from the Monastery of San Antonio, the solemn strains of the "Lamentation of Job," and saw the monarch, the grandees, and the officials mutter and cross themselves.

Into what a singular country was she introduced from the verdant pastures sloping to the Blue Danube, where the milch cows peacefully browse, to this sterile region, where they roasted living bulls and marred dance music with mournful psalms!

Unhappy as the Queen—more unhappy, since he had not one of the palliatives of wealth and rank—the poor student had left the Plaza, going in the opposite direction to that the procession had taken, and consequently retracing the steps which had brought him hither. Alone, he was doubly gloomy, for Zafari's incessant chatter had cheered him on the morning's stroll.

Hurried by the dread of their valuables being exposed after dusk, the wares of the crafts were being taken under cover. Still the rabble sauntered to and fro or stopped at the portable kitchens, where popular delicacies were hissing in oil. There was to be a display of fireworks, and an illumination of the mansions in the square with two or three thousand wax-lights, and the country people, unsatisfied with the day's show, lingered to see the last of it for that night.

Zafari and Matalobos had disappeared at the same time as the gold plate and other bait were withdrawn from public view, but Zafaris and Mataloboses still abounded in the throng, and Ruy felt an incompatibility of their vulgar images being allowed within his mind's gallery. There all previous pictures had been removed, and he had hung

up in their stead the portrait of the new Queen of Spain.

Simple worship, intuitive and enthralling, of youth for beauty and virtue, or the germ of a deeper and more exalted passion?

He knew not which; but, catching the legend on the banner of the Love in wax which had been left, with lighted perfumed lamps before it, as a kind of shrine, at the head of the Perfumers' and Glovers' Ward, he continued his retreat from the merrymakings, murmuring these lines—

"Pure glances are my deadly arrows;
The sweetest eyes are my worst quivers."

A few belated rustics leaped in at the city entrance as he passed forth to the amazement of the guards, who regretted their detention.

"Hillo! Know you not of the bull fights with flambeaux?" questioned one of these. "You are never going to miss this novel diversion!"

But Ruy hastened on down the slope, without saying, "Good night!"

"They say wonders never come single," said the archer, turning to his comrade, "for, look you, here is another barbarian who is quitting our town without seeing the fireworks and the fire-baited bulls! To think that we should have two idiots in Castile, saving his Majesty!"

"Ay; it is announced that this time the horns will not be buttoned, and, maybe, some one will be really wounded to death. The world is not worth a maravedi since this false sentiment came in, and body armour went out!"

The man who followed Ruy Blas in the path that was so unpopular, was the wearer of the black mantle, whom Zafari, with an acquaintance with the peerage somewhat remarkable in a beggar, had stated to be the Marquis of Finlas, Secretary of the Royal Council.

Marquis or mere spy of the Inquisition dispatched to run home the utterer of the strange welcome to the Queen, he stuck close to the young man's errant steps.

Out in the country, the loneliness and the silence were increased by the concentration of all life and noise in the town. There had reeked the taint of burnt oil, garlic, and thousands of breaths, and here a sweet scent faintly floated from the heather bloom which clothed the blackening hills like bishop's capes. Towards the east, at the northern end of the glow of twilight, at the point where the scholar imagined Germany to lay, near the horizon, out of a dull yet limpid medium, stole forth Venus. The blending was ineffably subtle of the sapphire and the shadow. Rapidly her magnificent rays poured on the landscape, already dimly seen, and while its grace and serenity inspired melancholy, its growing brilliancy rebuked despair. It was like an eye of heaven amorously open on the slumbering country, deserted by its daily occupants, and with its lofty loveliness ignoring man's essay, with rocket and torch, to emulate the volcanoes which are the *feux de joie* of the Almighty, and into the craters of which she fearlessly peered.

He turned away from the bridge, on which he saw a shadow or two moving, for his desire to shun his fellows was as strong of a sudden as that to serve them, which the comparison of his poverty with so much splendour had blunted, almost deadened into nothingness, Ruy walked on until he stood on the river bank. The watermills were having a rest; the rush went idle under the raised wheel; the washerwomen's houses were deserted, and even the pariah dogs which usually grubbed among the heaps of refuse along the shore, had betaken themselves into

the town to feast for once on fresh meat and fragments of those patties "in all shapes and most curiously gilded and tinted," on which the narrator of the Queen's Joyous Entry expatiated with Lucullian relish. On the ridge behind Ruy, the diffused light of the sky pierced the two windows in the windmill of the good Fathers of the Charity, and they seemed the eyes of a giant pastor, squatting on the hillock and heartlessly regarding a flock of sheep that were panting and piteously bleating, for the shepherd had been enticed away by the festival, and was gorging while his charge starved.

"Type of the ministers of this great realm," thought Ruy, to whom the simile struck home from the turn of his mind when grand projects had monopolized it. "Spain languishes in famine while they look on and applaud the fights of bulls, cudgel players, and djerid throwers."

He gave a final look on the town where coloured flames outlined and painted domes, spires and towers, and impatiently flinging his ragged hat upon the frothing current, he muttered—

"And yet she was worth living and toiling for! Oh, the queenly Queen!"

In another moment he would have leaped into the flood, now so enlarged and turbulent as to make little of the struggles of one weak from fasting; but a strong hand fell on his left shoulder, and closed like a griffin's claw. To secure the young man, he had flung off a large black mantle, and Ruy recognized the spy of the balcony at the Count of Oñate's house.

"Ha!" he cried, about to speak the name which Zafari had used to designate him, and which, on this close inspection, seemed truly his. Although not more than thirty-five years of age, deep wrinkles grooved already the part of his brow which might be seen under the broad brim of a Flemish hat, sable, but decked with a scarlet plume. He was well built, and had skilled strength, as the ease with which he detained the youth sufficiently proved. His countenance at this moment inspired awe and terror. His eyes, greenish as a tiger's, shone with phosphoresence under thick black brows, growing close up to the hawk nose so common among the *condottiere*, as to be strong confirmation of the popular belief that "birds of a feather flock together." Everything about the visage, where the fleshiness from good living combatted with the emaciation of constant fretting through ambition; where the pale cheeks were streaked with violet veins, and the bloodless lips were curled in a smile of pride and assumed winningness — everything told the story of a noble spirit in a handsome frame, but depraved and degenerate from cupidity and insatiable desire, tempered with astuteness alone.

"Come away," he said, in a honeyed voice, but not relaxing his grip. "Night is the best cloak for man's follies; but the folly of self-slaughter is not a luxury for youth. Wait till you come to your sixtieth year. Why solve the question thus of whether the soul inhabits the blood, the heart, or the brain? Make a better and wiser choice. Let me lead you to the Hermitage of San Antonio, where I have a kinsman in authority, who will argue you by the hour into a sweeter state of mind. Or, as becomes your age and your manly proportions, there is yet time to enter the free field of the lance-throwers. I will provide you a cake and a cup of wine, and a horse to tilt against the sham Moors and Turks, and I doubt not that you would carry my colours out triumphantly in honour of your Queen of Beauty.

No answer? Are you, then, entangled with a pagan? Fie! Spain has too few soldiers. Better die in battle against her multipled enemies."

Here he let go his hold, feeling that the spasm of despair had passed, and that his hearer had at least, for the time, renounced his mad idea.

"I am low-born—of no known birth," faltered he.

"A fig on that! Look!" The town to which he pointed was suffused in the many lines of the artificial lights, and seemed a capital of fairyland. Out of the black cave where all was shadow, sprang iridescent columns of shifting shape as the fire wavered, supporting a golden dome, sprinkled with bursting stars. It was the *bouquet* of the pyrotechnical artist, brought from Italy to astonish Madrid.

"Pillars of porphyry and jasper, with their origin in the mud," said the man in black, sarcastically. "As long as your head is amid the gold, no one will sneer at the feet of clay. Live and work, and some day your name may span the heavens in letters of fire, as that of Carlos now."

Ruy flushed, and his eyes glittered with a brighter light than the reflection of the fireworks, reaching even here.

"Yes, I have idled too long; wasted too much time in sowing seed in stony places. Oh, that I had work to do, although I began at the lowest corner of the web!"

"Good! What if a noble took you into his household—not as a page, that being the privilege by birth of a *known* scion of races, but as a domestic, a lacquey?"

The young man turned pale, but, with a strong determination to set his foot anywhere on the ladder, at the summit of which he saw a recompense worthy of the utmost sacrifice, he looked the speaker straight in the subtle, fierce eye, and answered, firmly—

"My Lord Marquis of Finlas, I am yours to serve."

At the announcement of his title the other merely smiled, like one to whom celebrity had its charms, and he marked a tone of respect in the youth which flattered his pride. Don Sallusto, Marquis of Finlas, was a Bazan, that is to say, bearer of one of the highest names in the kingdom. His grandfather, Juan, was the famous admiral and general whose lustre sufficed to gild several generations.

"I accept," said he, gravely.

At this juncture, vexed at being retained on the bridge, the watchman resolved to contribute his part to the rejoicings. Coming out of his little watch box with a pan of fire, which he set on the parapet, he sprinkled it with powder, and in an instant the contiguous objects were illumined with a crimson glare. Ruy Blas and the nobleman could examine one another to the detail of a hair or a button.

The latter drew a case of tablets from his doublet, and, holding it up to the light, at a blank page wrote, with a silver pencil, reading, as his hand travelled with the speed and ease becoming the Secretary to the Council of State—

"I——"

"Ruy Blas."

"Ruy Blas, lacquey to his lordship the Marquis of Finlas, engage myself on every occasion, private as well as public, to serve him as a true servitor. Date it and sign," said the scribe, presenting the pencil and book; and as he was obeyed, he added, "as in you I find faithfulness, discretion, and reserve, I will unroll to you a broader sheet of fortune."

Had the watchman on the bridge, too intent on his little display,

looked in this direction, the superstition of the time would certainly have caused him to see in the group a repetition of a scene deemed then of frequent occurrence: the barter of a soul for a consideration to the Enemy of mankind.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FALLEN STAR.

In the Danaë Room of the Royal Palace, a courtier was restlessly pacing, having no eye in his meditation for the magnificent furniture in the semi-Flemish taste of the reign of King Don Philip IV., which he mechanically avoided with his hasty step. It was the Marquis of Finlas, over whose head, racked with incessant cares and sustained by thorough selfishness, a year had passed since he attached the despondent Ruy to his service. Through the tiny diamonds of glass, set in gilded beads in the lofty window, a broken light fell on the trained, impassible features of the perturbed Secretary. Curtains of Utrecht velvet concealed the doors to inner apartments, and to a long glazed gallery, which gave communication with the other portions of the edifice. With these he had nothing whatever to do now, for he was in disgrace. He was no longer one of the atoms in that brilliant dust which was cast from the falling ruins of the crumbling Empire into the eyes of History to deceive it into saying that Spain was still the greatest of the five-and-twenty States of Europe.

Suddenly he looked up, thinking he heard a noise of approaching footsteps — strange to hear where, after the pattern set by the barefooted friar, the sandalled monk, and the stealthy courtier, all tread was hushed. It was an error; but his eyes, which disdained the trivialities of the Dutch pictures (mingled on the arabesqued walls with landscapes of Collantes and the Titianlike pictures of Tristan), fastened on the only portrait which belonged to him, and which appeared now, with that searching gaze of a faithful likeness, to inquire into the cause of his exile.

It was the representation by "the Minor Titian" of the Great Bazan, and it showed a noble and martial personage in the heavy armour of 1500. Juan of Bazan was the greatest naval captain of that century, and his deserved renown had not been the least claim by which Don Sallusto had counted on attaining the post of *Privado* or Prime Minister

All had been promising until the young Queen, soon after arriving, gave indications that she was obtaining some influence over the King. The Great Bazan had been "his hero" to King Philip II., but the later one was less and less "his hero" to Charles II.

At length the Marquis had tried a fall with his fresh and disdained antagonist, and the shame of defeat was enhanced by the completeness of it. He had remained sleepless all night, like one who, felled by a thunderbolt, feels the double sensation of the numbness obstinately resisting expulsion, and the tingling, so exquisite, of animation on the return.

All was lost in a day, and through one of those grains of sand upon which the engineer never calculates, but which arrest the machine, or even throw it out of gear.

At a time like this, when a monarchy is collapsing, many phenomena may be observed. In the first

place the class which Don Sallusto represented dissolves, and in so doing, divides in the following manner.

The kingdom totters, the dynasty dies, and the laws fall in ruins. Political unity crumbles under the pressure of intrigue. The upper classes degenerate. A mortal weakness is felt by all, as well internally as from without. Though the great descend, the petty things remain upright, and never look more small, or offer a sight more mournful. There are no finances, and hence no police or army to defend them. In every mind there is annoyance at what has happened; fear at what may happen, and as great a distrust of all men, as discouragement about all matters—a profound disgust! As it is a disease of the head, the nobility is the first to suffer.

The part which remains at Court is the least honourable and generous.

Since all was to be engulfed, these hastened, as time pressed, like Don Sallusto, to enrich and aggrandize themselves, and profit by the circumstances. Each for his own hand, was the war cry in this ignoble warfare.

Without any pity for his country, the Marquis of Finlas garnered a fortune out of the unfortunate treasury. From mere courtier, he became next to the Minister, who was but a stalking-horse of the Queen-mother, keeping the most important and meritorious rival nobles from securing the Premiership. Don Sallusto fondly expected, after removing the Minister's patroness, to occupy his seat, but the death of Queen Louise had not cleared his path, since it allowed the second royal marriage, and the German bade fair to be a more stubborn opponent than the niece of Louis XIV.

Indeed, at the first move he was checked.

Up to this moment, he deserved the epithet of "The Discreet Don," which another minister had worn, but in his day of disgrace, something monstrous was fully developed in him, and the nobleman became a demon. And all for that which he regarded as a trifle. In a life devoted to vanity and the delights of pride, its first condition is the forgetfulness of all natural sentiments, and the scallop-shell of the Order of Compostella hung on a bosom without a heart.

"What a fool I have made of myself!" he muttered; "and at my age."

For he felt aged, in his defeat.

It may be remembered that, on the entry of Queen Maria Anna into Madrid, a frightened steed had knocked over a staging, and in its fall a *tableau vivant* had been brought to the ground. The queen, with that tact which ofttimes distinguishes her position, and which often takes the place of intuitive benevolence, had offered at once to adopt the little Indian girl who was injured slightly by a broken plank. Afterwards, charmed with the novelty of being served by the daughter of the Aztecs, she had taken the pretty Casilda into her own service. Why should she not? Did not the king foster a mania for dwarfs, and already black boys were regular appendages to ladies of quality. The Mexican pet of the queen was now as great a favourite with her as Lovisillo, the Flemish mannikin, with her husband.

On seeing that the newcomer was a plant of sturdy growth, and that the Queen-mother was apprehensive that she would outlive her, Don Sallusto, who had mocked at her, drew in his shafts of raillery and silently studied the growth of that which might be his bane. Soon perceiving that—far from falling into the pit commonly trapping the wives wedded by statecraft to the *simulacrum* of a

crowned man—Anna Maria bestowed not a second glance, or even one lingering look, upon any of the Spaniards who began to court her, and that she did not regret openly that her German attendants were dismissed and sent home—Don Sallusto encouraged, by overcoming the resentment of her new household against "the heathen," the affection of his royal mistress for the Indian, but re-doubled his endeavours to control the latter. To be the lord of the female favourite of the queen has before now been a *quasi*-government of the realm.

He succeeded beyond his hopes, or, at least, sooner than he set the hour of their fructification.

The Mexican girl of fifteen was as precocious as the Spaniard of eighteen, but the pride of the Montezumas spurred her into measures against the haughty noble which a woman of even a higher degree than that of the *ricos hombres* would not have ventured to act upon. Weeping, she bore the love-tokens and *billets doux* of the Secretary to her mistress, and besought her and the King to force the serious gallant to redeem his promises. Her claim to be an heiress of the Aztecs was vague, like most of the incidents in her story: Daughter of a native viceroy of Sonora, who set up an independency, and was with difficulty subdued by the Spanish, she had been captured on her way to Barcelona by the Moorish corsairs; retaken, she had arrived in Madrid in time to grace the welcoming pageant of the Queen. This piteous lesson of the vicissitudes of a princess royal, supported by highly coloured pictures of a golden-roofed, hidden city in Hispaniola, to which she might one day conduct an army, actually persuaded the King and the Queen to esteem her as fit mate for the head of the Finlas branch of the house of Bazan, and they, "for such was their pleasure," ordered Don Sallusto to make this dusky child of the sun his wife! He refused, without the courtier's habitual hesitation, and he was promptly exiled.

"What priest is in this plot?" he mused. "Ah, Fray Froylon! you who suggested that it was I who aided the overseers to bewitch the King—your hand is in this plucking away of the prop of my stage."

What embittered the gall in the cup, found after much pleasure, was the consciousness that he was not liked. When Don Juan, and the Duke of Lerma, and the Count of Olivarez fell, at least the people did not cheer. Now they would do a harder thing to bear—they would laugh at the destruction of Bazan's credit and power, and jest at "the salt of lust" (Sallusto), which had written *Nihil* at the end of the record of his twenty years of difficult tasks and nocturnal labours. The court officials, who hated him as their unpliable president, would no longer utter his name in terror. His post, so far to reach and hard to retain, his gifts, his honours, all were ashes; and like Lot, he would have to flee, without leave to look once behind.

Entering quietly, his valet, a man of reserved demeanour and silvered beard, began to collect the little articles of his master's private property, and heap them upon the long mosaic table where that looking-glass still stood, with its "star" of crackling upon it, memorable in superstitious story. It was averred that the late Queen Louise had touched it lightly, and yet made it fly to splinters. They were to accompany him into exile—books, toys, presents of princes of the blood and of the Church.

On seeing these painful keepsakes heaped pellmell, he heaved a sigh and violently burst the throat button of his doublet.

"Gudiel," said he, testily, "you clasped me this morning as tightly as a priest is buttoned up. I am stifling!"

He sank upon a seat and plucked with an impatient finger at the velvet on his arm.

"The State will plunge into the whirlpool without any farther circling round in my absence from the helm," he muttered. "I shall watch the wreck from my safe distance, for the existence of States is not suspended by the same thread as the life of statesmen. What have we here?" as he pulled the books asunder which the valet was about to place in a leathern valise. "Ah! these juxtapositions often point a moral—*El Filosofo* and *La Jacinta*—as unseemly a union as that the hoodwinked idiot and his blonde Consort approved for me. Idiot of a being! neither pious nor regal! I myself should never be *sanctus*—but believe me, my great forefather, I aim to be *magnus.* Gudiel," he interrupted himself by saying to the servant, "your silence tells me that you know the news of my — my downfall. Well, who else is as wise?"

"My lord," said the man, tranquilly, "nobody knows it yet. I have the felicity of kinship with Donna Josepha de Figueroa, maid of honour to her Majesty, and she told me, with grief in her eyes, that you had lost the King's good graces because you had championed the ladies of the royal body against the despicable little Mexican."

"Ah! but to-morrow—to-night, or by noon—they will all know it. Nevertheless, I do not want this to be viewed as my downfall, but as my setting to rise again. I might have been a star of peace and prosperity, Gudiel. God forbid that when I come again, after poor Spain has been distracted by foreign plots, I shall seem one of those meteors which accompany the dissolution of States."

"Amen, my lord."

"And for an Indian! Put away this mistress and this master," said he, rising and spurning both volumes with the same contempt; "but part them, since the sage and the siren are enemies from the time the emblem of wisdom tempted the woman from amid the fruit of the Tree of Life. An omen the sage will prevail."

In saying "sage" he meant serpent, for he added, in his sleeve, "I will go away and make my approach, as the sappers do, without any symptom of it—deep, obscure, and under the ground."

"Methought my lord was embedded in the good graces of our King," remarked the servant, with the confidence of an old retainer born with his lord and from whom his lord would bear any question.

"Ay, the blow comes from the other, the Queen," replied Don Sallusto, as he resumed his pacing the room, his cheek catching the red beam of the rising sun, which, on the face of Danaë greeting the god in his golden shower, seemed a celestial glory; on the disgraced minister it resembled the flames of the Inferno. "You may hear my vow of vengeance, for you have been by my side some thirty years, and have aided me and served me in past deeds. You know whither my aim tended in the gloom, as a good architect, by his expert glance, metes the profundity of the well he has had dug. I am going to draw up my plan of the return game, Gudiel, in my country seat. All for an Indian girl, whose ancestors fled, a myriad strong, from a score of Spanish knights! Let us be off as soon as you can manage it."

"Avenge yourself?"

"Yes, though I have no idea how,

just yet; but I mean to have it done in a dreadful manner. A Bazan can do nothing paltry."

"Am I going with you, my lord? I thought that this new servant——"

"Jealous?—not of him. I will say a word to this Ruy Blas on the chance of his being of use to me, even though I shall no longer be the ruler here. Keep silent, and send the fellow to me."

The servant drew the straps tight on the valise and carried it out with him through a side issue. The noble paused before the glass which had broken of itself and contemplated his tranquillised features.

"You were but seven-and-twenty, when the bubbles on a cup of chocolate sufficed to add you to the flanking column of mortality, which gradually loses deserters to swell your host. 'My good Queen Louise!' as says the King—you braved my influence, and you perished! Look on this splintered mirror some day, Queen Maria Anna, and dread a fate as sudden and severe!"

Although the newcomer had not made any sound, Don Sallusto turned, for he felt that he was no longer alone. Holding up the tapestry, and enframed in the small side portal, Ruy Blas was awaiting orders. It was hard to recognize the poor scholar of the weather-stained and well-worn habiliments, in this gold and vermilion livery coat, without even a belt for a dagger. On his head was no cap, and his limbs seemed to move vigorously in the capacious breeches and elastic hose of brown thread, almost as fine as silk.

Don Sallusto put on at leisure his white-plumed black hat, its short plush harmonizing with the black velvet Court costume, which, out of bravado, he had determined to wear through the streets for the last time.

"Ruy, bring me my collar of the Golden Fleece," he commanded, "and my violet mantle. Fill my purse with gold, too, and hasten to me."

When the lacquey returned, his master had girded on a handsome sword, with a highly ornamented hilt of damascened and perforated steel, and stood at the window, with his back to it.

"They are here, your Excellency," said he.

"Put them on me," was the reply, and as it was being done, the Secretary proceeded, in an unmoved voice, "I am not going to sleep in the palace. So close the blinds and curtains, and leave the keys of my suite with the Lord Chamberlain."

Ruy bowed, without any surprise.

"Mark, I prithee, this: her Majesty the Queen-Consort will pass the end of this corridor on her way back from hearing mass, in a couple of hours, to her apartments. In my absence, it is proper that one in my livery should offer my respect—be you there."

"My lord, I shall be there," replied the servant, with a slight brightening in his eye, which he concealed by his low bow.

The nobleman turned, and gesticulating, for the pane of glass in the window, which served as a bull's-eye or loophole, to be opened, he looked out on the little square, where, after a short period of examination, he descried a man in the grey shadow, which was now turning into yellow, and who lounged up and down with carelessness. Suddenly, aroused by the strokes of a clock, he crossed the *plazuella* and showed a paper to the palace guardsman, who stood like a statue at the gateway.

"Here," said Don Sallusto to his lacquey, "do you see that man challenged by the gate-ward? Ah, he's let him pass! Good! Hie you to

the bottom of the backstairs, and, without speaking to him, beckon him to come up hither by that way."

Ruy bowed again, and vanished by the back door. The Marquis turned to another minor issue, and, entering a short lobby beyond the door, noiselessly moving on well oiled hinges, saw that in a closet without a door, upon oaken benches running round the three sides, the alguazils on duty were conscientiously snoring. He struck the sword of one, in its scabbard, with his foot, and at the rattle its owner awoke and looked up. The awakener laid his finger on his lip, made him a sign that he was to arouse the other two, which he did with an alacrity meant to argue against the belief that he had been caught napping, and he withdrew.

"He is coming up," said Ruy, who returned into the *salon* at the same time as his master.

"Speak low! As I shall require you, do not go beyond call. Keep watch, so that I shall not be disturbed by anybody."

And he stationed himself after the mode of officials, so that his back should be to the light which would fall on the visitor's front.

CHAPTER V.

THE HONOUR OF THE SCAPEGRACE.

SIMULTANEOUSLY with the departure of the lacquey, the man seen on the little square, and who had mounted the private stairs without any haste, appeared in the doorway. Don Sallusto had good eyes, and, in spite of the morning light not being yet strong, he believed that the two exchanged a look of mutual surprise. They were evidently acquaintances.

As soon as the door closed after Ruy Blas, and the hangings fell against its white and gold panels, the Marquis eyed the visitor with warm indignation, crying—"So you have come, bandit?"

"Bandit" was the proper appellation for this tall figure in the dented felt hat, full and ragged cape, and unstrung hose of the redoubtable Zafari. It was the same man and the same costume, even to the murderous and provoking rapier, of a year ago, only a little raggeder.

"Ay, coz, I am here."

"Cousin to a marquis! Truly, my pleasure should be great to meet a rascal like you!" went on Don Sallusto, sarcastically.

With a low bow, Zafari replied that the charm was also upon his side.

"Sirrah, your doings are town talk!" resumed the Marquis. "And in the *Gazette*."

"So much the better; it has been but dull reading lately—no victories by land or sea, the execution of a poacher in the royal hunt of El Prado, the picture of the Irish pony bought for the King's dwarf—faith, I am glad the accounts of my deeds are to the printer's taste, and yours more desired."

"The other night, Don Carlos de Mira was robbed of his buff coat and of a valuable sword—on the eve of Easter, too!"

"Stay! the band left him his cloak of the Order of St. Iago, because, gentle lamb! the cross was embroidered upon it. Thievish, I grant you, but not irreligious!"

"Is that how you defend yourself?"

"Deuce take the devil's advocate! if he can say more than that we live in a dreadful era. What would become of us if, while the nobles rob the crown, thieves did not respect the cross?"

"You were in the party, then?"

"That I was; but I only advised Don Carlos to give up the sword he knew not how to use, and the buff coat which did not cover the lion heart, that our pagan Abdallah is always averring he must eat some day. I never touched him!"

"Only yesterday, a better piece of midnight pastime still; the moon was no sooner down, than the watch, who sought to clear the Plaza Mayor of a herd of barefooted and capless vagrants who were turned out of a vile den, higgledy-piggledy — were attacked. You were there, cousin?"

"I was there; nothing more, for I have always disdained to fight a police-officer. During the scuffles I sauntered up and down under the arcades composing an anthem. There were several heads broken—as I broke

Priscian's, and several legs walked away—lame as my verses."

"That is not all."

"Let's have the whole," rejoined Zafari, sitting on the arm of an easy-chair, and swinging his ragged boot.

"In an advice from France I learn that you and your companions, who are rebels against law everywhere, broke open the custom-house cash-box."

"They would not supply the keys," said the bravo, negligently. "Besides I am not going to deny that we should have taken the gold any way, for France is an enemy's country."

"But in our good land of Flanders," pursued Don Sallusto, dropping the sarcastic tone for that of a judge, "you laid hands on the money of the Church on meeting Don Paul Barthelémy, who was carrying to Mons the tithe of a vineyard which he had received for the Noble Chapter."

"Was that in Flanders?" cried Zafari, ceasing to swing his foot, "may be it was: I have travelled so far! Methinks that I read him the text about giving 'all thou hast,' and following the way to Heaven—and not to Ghent, where too many breweries ruin the sinner. Is that the last?"

"Don Cæsar of Bazan," thundered the Marquis, "whenever I think of you, the flush of shame rises to my face."

"Very well, let it rise!"

"Our family——"

"Tut, tut! that will not do," interrupted the unveiled Zafari, "no! You are the only person in town or country who knows my real name, so we need not lug the family into it."

"In the country, much might pass uncommented upon," said Don Sallusto, softening his voice, "but you call attention on yourself here. On coming out of the Church of All the Martyrs, a countess asked me to remark you as you paraded your dilapidated cape at the street corner. Alas! I blushed."

"But the lady smiled! Go to! I like to be smiled upon by fair dames."

"You were in a knot of infamous cutthroats!"

"Clerks, my coz! scholars as mild as mutton; what you took to be poniards were pens."

"Or else one meets you encircled by lights o' love! like one who had shot his last bolt."

"Thus are maligned my Lucindas of love—my sweet Isabellas! Verily, the balladist is right, and nothing goes down that is home-grown. Wait, wait, you who malign the roguish black eyes to whom I sing at even my morning's sonnets—wait until the next shipload of beauties from New Spain is landed. They say that the Indian girls will be all the rage."

Sallusto bit his lip at the taunt, and changing the delicate theme, he continued, with a wavering of the voice, "I would not care so much if you did not go about so ragged."

"Ragged!" ejaculated Don Cæsar, rising and drawing himself erect, "how can you say that? 'Tis true that my outer wrapper is a little dingy—keep your streets cleaner, oh, my minister of Madrid! but it is but the protection to beautiful things Behold!" he threw back the cape, and displayed, in the absence of surcoat, a vest that had been a splendid specimen of the court tailor's art.

"It was the vest of the Count of Alba," said he, "the finest piece of satin I ever knew. Matalobos made me a present of it."

"And you are not ashamed to wear stolen property?"

"I should never be ashamed of donning a good, sound garment, laced and embroidered liberally, which kept me warm last winter, and makes me handsome in the sunshine. When

he took it off—the amber-scented fop—after the exhibition of it at the *festa* for the reception of the Queen, the pockets were full of love letters by certain uncertain creatures whom I will not dilate upon in this hallowed place. Often, when I have had nothing to sharpen my teeth upon, but was roving amid my poverty, I have hunted for the window of the bishop's kitchen, where the steam from the stewpans flowed forth, and sat down to peruse the sweet stuff. By my eagle-nosed namesake! I deceived my appetite and my heart at the same time with the odour of the feast and the shadow of love."

"Don Cæsar," began the other, with the former tone of censure.

"A truce to rebukes, my cousin," interrupted the other, curtly. "It is all very true that I am a high-born noble, and your next of kin. My name is Don Cæsar, and I am the Count of Garofa, whatever is said or done."

The Count of Garofa! everybody would know him now. The prodigal who had amply pensioned Célimènes out of the products of his estates and palaces, but, before his twentieth year was reached, had wasted everything, so that he had no token left of so much prosperity, except the pack of creditors yelping at his heels. He took to flight, and when he came back to Madrid, did so, as we saw, under a fantastic name, gipsyfied like his new life. He was believed to be no more, or seeking a fortune in the Indies, whilst he led a happier course than of old. No money came from his relative, and he slept on the pavement before mansions where he had been the spoilt guest. He drank at the public fountain, who had bathed in wine, and, sometimes, stopping by chance at the palace in course of erection, which had been begun for him in his halcyon days, would good-humouredly offer suggestions to the Italian sculptor who festooned the doorway with marble cupids and the infant Bacchus dancing hand in hand.

"I have had nearly ten years of this masterless life," he said; "there is not a thorn among my roses. And yet I wish the wheel of Fortune to cast one of its golden rivets into my hand. Cousin, you have refused me thousands—lend me ten crowns!"

Don Sallusto had his hand on the well-filled purse which his servant had brought, and which graced his girdle, as the last speaker had already noticed, as well as the gleam of yellow in the distended meshes.

"Hearken," he said.

Don Cæsar folded his arms like one who cannot get out of the church and nerves himself to listen to the sermon.

"I have called you to me because I want to be of use to you," proceeded Don Sallusto, cordially. "I am the eldest of our family, unwed, rich, and without children. They suggest that I shall wed, mind you—one under high patronage, too; but I will not disinherit you for a stranger. It is with regret that I have seen you lured towards the gulf of destruction, and I mean to drag you back. Boast as you may of the pleasures of free poverty, you are unhappy. I will pay your debts, restore you your houses, and re-instate you in the Court. More, I will set you up as the faithful knight of beauty! Let Zafari die in the ashes and Don Cæsar arise new born without any heed of the future. I would like you to dip freely into my money boxes, with both hands, whenever you fancy it. Zounds! a man must support his brothers of the same house, and not be pitiless to his flesh and blood."

"San Martin, who divided with the beggar, hath inspired you," cried the young man, whose face had

shown alternations of astonishment, delight, and confidence up to this point, when, unable to govern his emotion, he burst forth, "You were always as witty as the lame devil. What you say is very eloquent. Continue, I beseech you."

"Cæsar, on this I put only one condition."

"Hem!" his brow clouding.

"I will make all clear in an instant. Meanwhile, take this purse."

Don Cæsar weighed the offering in his hand, and, with glittering eyes, murmured, "It is magnificent!"

"I shall allow you five hundred ducats besides."

"Oh, Marquis!" faltered the dazzled adventurer.

"As a yearly pension," continued Don Sallusto.

"Death of my life!" cried the other, "I am entirely your own. Name the conditions. On my faith, as a brave Christian, my sword has become yours, and I your slave. If you like, I would cross steel with the Venetian fencing master whom the Italian Ambassador has brought to mortify our swordsmen."

"No, I do not accept your blade, Don Cæsar, and for a good reason," said the statesman.

"Then what can you want of me? I have nothing else of any value."

Don Sallusto drew him into a recess between two statues on their pedestals of Nox and Aurora, which an ingenious hand had transformed, by addition of plaster tunics and an orthodox cross and palm, into saints, and answered in an undertone—

"You know all the desperadoes in the town. Don't protest, for this time it is a Godsend to you."

"You flatter me."

"You are always dragging a cohort at your heels, and could, at the scratch, raise a riot, I know. This may come into use."

"Upon my honour," exclaimed the vagrant, bursting into laughter, "it strikes me that you are composing an opera! What part in the work are you going to confide to my talent? Command me. I am a good hand at the marrow bones and cleaver as any flesher in the butchers' ward."

"I am speaking to Don Cæsar, and not to Zafari," pursued the nobleman, lowering his voice more and more and, glancing round the room like one who, if he doubted that walls had ears, feared that behind the pictures there might be eavesdroppers; "hear me out. For a result not to be specified, I need somebody to work by my side in the shadow in aid of my bringing about a mighty event. I am not an evil man; but there come times, in the affairs of state, when the most dainty must lay aside repugnance, and, rolling up their sleeves, set to hard work. So Hercules is still a demigod, though, in cleansing the Augean stables, he accomplished an unsavoury labour. You shall be rich; but you must quietly help me to set a good springe in the night, as birdsnarers do, concealed by an attractive mirror. Come, come, you are not a scrupulous man! You must, by some marvellous and terrible plan, assist me to avenge myself."

Don Cæsar, subjugated by the intense feeling in the hoarse whisper, repeated the words—"Avenge! and on whom?"

"On a bird from afar—on a woman."

"Halt!" cried the errant noble, straightening up, and proudly staring the other into silence. "Do not say another word! Upon my soul, cousin of mine, you have laid down your sentiments so plainly, that I shall bluntly expose mine. The man who, albeit a noble, and with the right to wear a sword, basely and tortuously seeks, in revenge, to use

it against a woman, is, though born a gentleman, an alguazil in his action. Were he a grandee of Old Castile, covered with stars and garters, like a leading mule with charms and bells, a viscount, or a marquis, son of the olden chivalry, with a hundred trumpets to sound his glories, he still would be to me only a shady and sneaking scoundrel, whom I would hang up on the town gibbet for fourpence, as fit pay for such vile cowardice."

"Cæsar!" began the Marquis.

But the indignant man flung the purse at the feet of Don Sallusto.

"Don't add a word to the insult!" said he. "Keep your money, and your secret. Any man can understand how a wretch may become a thief, and pillage and slay—storm some roundhouse on a moonless night, at the head of a hundred buccaneers, battle-axe in hand, and play the mischief with warders, turnkeys, and doormen. Bandits and prison guards are natural opponents, and when man meets man, the good old rule is, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth!' But, stealthily to destroy a woman! to lay a noose for her little feet, and retaliate brutally upon her for her humour, which, I grant you, is sometimes grating to the nerves; to take the pretty bird in your villainous lime! S'death! rather than link myself to such dishonour—though at the price of becoming a rich and lofty lord—I would rather—as the King of Kings sees into my soul—become so vile, odious, and wretched that I should be branded and beheaded, till a dog came and gnawed my skull at the foot of the pillory!"

All the rage which the rover had harboured during nine years, rejoiced to find this outlet, and the appeal of his hearer for caution, if not silence, was completely unheeded.

"I have no longing for your boons," he went on as warmly, "so long as I may find a spring or a fountain, and open air in the country. My dead prosperity dwells in oblivion, and I can sleep with my head in the shadow, and my feet in the sun, on the slab before your great mansions, without any dread of the awakening. Farewell! God knows which of us is the just man. I leave you, Don Sallusto, among your fellows, the Court parasites, while I remain with my rogues. I like to live with wolves—not vipers."

Draping himself in his tatters more arrogantly than a noble senator about to die under the axe of the Goth, he almost dashed aside the hand gently put out to stay him for an instant.

"Cut this visit short, my master," he said. "If you are going to send me into prison, be quick about it."

To his immense bewilderment, instead of evincing annoyance, if not fierce disappointment, the Marquis only smiled.

"Prison! tush! Come, come, Don Cæsar! I believed you more keen. But the test I used was a good one, and has succeeded upon you. I am contented to find your metal true, and I beg to shake your honourable hand."

"How now?" cried the astounded man, cooling suddenly.

"I only said what I did by way of a jest—a touchstone—nothing more."

"This changes the tables! Then, that talk about a woman—a plot—a vengeance——"

"All imagination!" answered the Secretary of State, continuing to laugh at the other's blank amazement.

"That's better, then," said the latter, joining mechanically in the laugh. "But," he quickly resumed as he caught sight of the purse on the floor, slowly disgorging a golden

scale or two like a black snake which had found a yellow one too large a mouthful, "how about the offer to pay my debts? Was that a vision? And those five hundred ducats for the year? Were they all in the imagination?"

"Not at all. If you will wait here, I will go and fetch the gold."

As Sallusto crossed the room, his kinsman eyed him narrowly, for, while deceived in some degree by the Secretary's excellent acting and artful speech, he doubted the treacherous face, and thought that the eye was not as frank as the lips that said "Yes." Hence, as soon as his illustrious cousin had disappeared in the corridor to confer, not with the strong box, but with the alguazils, Don Cæsar looked about him for the outlet by which he had been conducted. Without much loss of time he found it, and had lifted the curtain out of the way, when he saw the door-handle turn, and he drew back a step, clapping his hand on his sword hilt. But, on the panel swinging round and disclosing the new comer, he let fall his hand, and uttered, in a tone of mingled gladness and renewed surprise,

"On my faith, it was you, Ruy Blas! And I was not mistaken!"

"Zafari!" exclaimed the other young man. "You! what are you doing in the palace?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE SECRET OF LOVE.

"Doing in the palace?—nothing, as is my wont," answered the rake-shame, as our fathers called those noblemen who retained nothing of nobility but an idea of honour, the name they hid, and the sword they paraded too much like a swash-buckler. "I am but passing through. I am going, for I am a bird that loves room. But," and he gave him a more attentive look as he recovered from his surprise, "are you in disguise?"

"No," replied Ruy, with bitterness, shivering in his livery. "I should be disguised, if I were attired otherwise."

"Expound yourself!"

"Let me shake your hand first, as in the happy days of joy and misery, when we were cold and hungry and homeless—but were free! Then I was a man, and now I am a lacquey."

"My poor friend!" said Don Cæsar, who preferred to play the gipsy, than to serve even the King. "Well, I know that hunger is a low door, whereat the man who has the highest head has to stoop the lowest; but necessity makes him pass there. Lift up your heart, comrade, which always had a buoyancy not far below my own. Fate has its flow and reflux. Hope on!"

"The servant does not hope who calls the Marquis of Finlas his master," muttered Ruy, shaking his head disconsolately.

"By the soul of Alonso the Wise! you are right! I know him," said Don Cæsar. "Are you living in this palace?"

"No! I never passed the threshold until this morning."

"How's that, if attached to the Marquis, who is Secretary of the Council? Has German economy crept in with the young Queen, and is not the State official allowed rooms and firing, and a glass of the royal wines out of the purse of the Crown?"

"Yes, he lives here, for he is in hourly request by the Court; but he keeps his own *retiro* only a hundred paces off, where he never comes in the daytime. In this quiet abode I am installed, brother. Sometimes, after dark, he lets masked and cloaked fellows in by a secret door of which he alone carries the key. They confer together in muffled voices, closeted in darkness, and nobody knows what it is all about. There are two servingmen, but they are black mutes, and they obey me as their master, not knowing my name."

"A hundred paces off?" inquired Don Cæsar, interested.

"Yes, in the passage to the House of the Novices of Saint Eloy."

"I have it! Why, man, it is there that he, as captain of the alcades, receives his spies, and prepares his ambuscades for better rogues than he is. Oh, he is a deep man, who tries to hold all the threads of the puppets who form the world in his single hand."

"He ordered me, yesterday, to come into the palace by the Golden Gate, and when I arrived he gave me this livery coat, an odious garb

that I wear, as you see me, for the first time."

"Faugh! the cowl does not make the monk. Hope still," repeated the reckless don.

"Hope! you would not say that word if you knew all," said the youth, with a vehemence that proved how glad he was of a trusty confidant. "It were nothing to live under a sullying and disgraceful coat after losing joy and pride. To be a vile slave would be no matter to grieve over." He led him into the window recess, and added, "Brother, I do not feel this burning shirt, though it is one of Nessus; for in my breast writhes a hydra with fiery fangs, which crushes my heart with ardent folds. Do you shrink from my garment? Oh, what would you do if you could see within."

The laughing philosopher was sobered for once by the intensity of sorrow and anguish in his friend's voice, and looked at him with a pitiful wonder.

"Search in your brain," proceeded Ruy; "invent, imagine, and suppose. Find out so strange and horrible, so senseless, and incredible a fatality that you would recoil aghast. Yea, compose a dreadful poison—excavate an abyss deeper down than madness leads, and far blacker than crime, and you will not yet be nigh unto my secret. You do not guess. Hark!"

Through the single pane which had not been perfectly closed, from across the courtyard gardens, where a fountain dashed into sparkling spray down upon glittering carp in a basin of alabaster which the Moorish sculptor had covered unsparingly with arabesques in silver and azure, there came a strain of tinkling music: a skilful player was making the *clavicord* the worthy accompaniment to a sweet song in an unknown tongue.

"Still, you do not guess?"

"I hear strange music, and a song still more barbaric!"

"It is the Indian girl who amuses the maids-of-honour with songs of her savage country."

"Well, the saints forbid that a Christian should fall in love with a pagan! Beware of love—real love, my poor boy! Saith not the poet, that, if you would avoid tragedies, you must shun the sex? But, hold! have I an inkling of the trouble? This Indian girl has fascinated no less than the Marquis, your mas—— our master! Out on it! you are the rival of——"

"Cease your laughter, and listen. She is accompanied by a hand loftier than hers, though she be a Princess——"

"Well?"

"Her royal mistress's——"

"Ah, how condescending! but, Ruy, Ruy, what an odd flame in your eyes!"

"No, who would divine, Zafari?" said the lacquey, laying his hand on his friend's arm, as he directed his eyes across the courtyard, and listened like one enrapt; then, drawing a long breath as the music suddenly ceased, as if a window had been closed, he muttered, so faintly that he hardly heard his own voice:

"Zafari, plunge your eyes into the gulf, whither my destiny drags me —I am in love with the Queen!"

"Heaven!" ejaculated the nobleman who had become a brigand, but yet preserved the superstitious worship of his class for royalty, and he receded.

"Yes, here where the Moorish monarchs built their Alcazar and defied the earthquake, which finally demolished it; here, where Don Pedro made the whole of Spain bend in terror; here, where the great Charles strode in redoubtable majesty—a mockery of a sovereign

glides! If this phantom were a man, if not even princely, I should be his rival——"

"The King's rival?" repeated Don Cæsar, unable to believe his ears at this expression of treason, never dreamt of by him in his most rebellious caprices.

"Yes, for I am in love with the wife whom the policy of states has sent into companionship with a spectre!"

"Oh, wretched man!"

"Listen to all. Having my days to myself, I hover about the palace to see her come forth. I watch her like a madman, and every night I dream about the poor fly entangled in this tissue of dull cares. You see, brother, that 'madman' is the word."

"The deuce! your escapade is fraught with danger. Beware! Let me tell you that her majordomo, the Count of Oñate, loves her, too, in his way, and he guards her closely as the sultana in the seraglio. But what an idea to cherish! To love a queen! How the mischief did it come about?"

"How can I tell? Oh, Zafari, I would sell my soul to the foul fiend, as, meseems, I sold my pride to his chief minister—to be one of those young lordlings whom you can see there in the courtyard, now entering the Queen's apartments with the fluttering cloak and the flaunting plume, like a living affront. Yea, I would lose my lot in Paradise to fling aloof my fetters and appear before her Majesty in raiment not shameful! Oh, consuming wrath, to be by her and before these gallants in the lacquey's livery! a menial in the presence of the woman I love! Oh, Heaven, have mercy upon me!"

Don Cæsar, divided between the desire to soothe his friend, whom he simply believed to have gone out of his mind, and to elude his cousin, whose intentions he less than ever believed to be amicable, had drawn himself out of the embrasure. The speaker followed him.

"But I remember that you asked me why I loved her, and how it came about. On the day when you were parted from me by the rushing of the crowd, when she entered the town amid the joy of the people—but you are not listening! and, for that matter, where is the good in my replying? though you were always inquisitive, and had the art of racking the spirit with a thousand questions, you forbear them now? You are daunted by the enormity of my aspiration! Well, my blood boils and it is madly that I adore her! that I love her is all!"

"Don't excite yourself," said Don Cæsar, supporting his friend, who tottered and fell, pale and exhausted after his transport, upon an armchair.

He was suffering, and the other saw that it was real. He laid his hand on his shoulder, on the coat which did not repel him now, and looked down on the infatuated one with sad but trusting friendship.

"Forgive me," said Ruy, "and leave me; go, brother! Quit the miserable fool who nurses the passions of a king under the coat of a lacquey!"

"Quit you! I wish I had never brought you into the town full of temptations, or left your side. I condole with you, but I envy you, for I have never felt any deep emotion. I am a poor tongueless bell that does not jangle. I am a beggar who goes about seeking love and has scraps tossed to him. My heart is a burnt-out coal; my soul has contracted into its shell. Ah, well may I yearn for such a love as fills you and wells up with its overflow into your eyes."

If palaces resemble the prison of

Dionysius' Ear, but seldom, on the whole, the portion assigned to the Prime Minister and his secretary often contains all the appliances ingenuity can supply to add to the intelligence of rulers.

Don Sallusto, on standing among the trio of armed retainers, partly police agents and partly spies, men who wore dark clothes and never demurred to the terms or aim of any order from a high quarter, said to their chief—

"A beggarly-looking knave will be leaving the palace presently, and counting coin. Follow him till you come to some lonely spot where you can make yourselves master of him without noise. Have a care, for he carries a famous blade! Don't be too violent, as his hide will sell at a higher figure unscratched. Take him by the shortest road to the nearest seaport, and on showing this order to the captain of any King's ship, he will take him aboard. Go with him, and, notwithstanding any nonsensical clamour he may raise, sell him on the sea to the African corsairs. Let one of you call at the Treasurer's in passing out for a thousand piastres on this ring of mine, to share among you. Get to your places quickly."

Left alone in the lobby, he opened a small sliding panel which offered a peephole in the ornamental carving of a Florentine frame, through which he could see the two young men in fraternal conversation very clearly, but could not hear them well. On seeing that their dialogue was near the end, he took a sword and a hat from a rack and a purse from a secret press, and returned slowly and quietly into the Hall of Danaë. So quiet, indeed, was his step that he did not at first startle either. He deposited the hat and sword upon a chair and laid the purse on the table, saying:—

"Here is the money."

At the sound of his voice, Don Cæsar turned and Ruy sprang up like one awakened suddenly, and stood with downcast eyes in an attitude of respect. The outcast noble stepped before him, angry that the black spy should have been lurking at the door unsuspected by him.

"Pooh! what does it matter, after all!" he muttered, coming to the table and opening the purse on the velvet cloth. An avalanche of ducats rolled out, and he began with glee to pile them up regularly.

"I thank you, Don Sallusto," he faltered, forgetting his irritation.

The Marquis smiled grimly as Don Cæsar amused himself like a boy in putting the pieces in rows and then sorting them into two equal columns.

"Brother!" said the Bohemian Count of Garofa, as he turned towards Ruy and raised his head, "this is your share. Take it, and come with me, and be a free man!"

An execration escaped, though partly suppressed, from the thin lips of the Secretary, who was watching the pair in the background; but he was relieved by seeing his servant shake his head in token of refusal.

"Nay," he answered, "it is the heart that ought to be delivered. Nay, my fate is here, and I am bound to remain."

"Very well; follow your whim," said Don Cæsar, rising. "Heaven alone knows whether you are mad or I wise;" and raking all the coins together he crammed them into the purse again and put that into his pocket, with a clumsiness which betrayed how unusual the operation had become.

"*Adios!*" said he to his friend, who grasped his hand.

"Farewell," said Ruy, sadly.

As they stood facing one another, the Marquis was struck by the resemblance between them in face and

even bearing, for, while the impudence of the Count and the effrontery of the Zingaro were lacking in the poor scholar, the latter had not less of the demeanour of a prince, and more of the fervid gaze of a poet. Absorbed in the gladness of holding a fortune, and saddened by the parting with the companion who rejected his share of the unexpected windfall, Don Cæsar swaggered out of the room, casting a triumphant glance at Danaë, whose delight he understood and whose fate was like his own, without remarking the scrutiny of his cousin and the latter's evil smile of contentment.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL.

For a time after the parting with his comrade of boyhood, as if a link had snapped, Ruy continued to follow the lost one with eyes of thought. He would have felt more sorrowful only if he had foreseen in any way to what a terrible fate the Marquis had deliberately consigned his kinsman. Suddenly he heard his name pronounced authoritatively, yet in a soft voice, and, wheeling quickly, he saw that his master occupied the centre of the room, not having deigned to take a glimpse through the window at the visitor.

"My lord?"

"When you came here this morning, I am not certain whether it was daybreak or not?" began the noble.

"It was not quite light, your excellency," was the reply. "The doorkeeper, in fact, was still stupefied with sleep, for he did not break the silence, and I went up without hearing any of the budget of tittle-tattle with which these gentry regale the first-comer."

"The wind is so sharp in the morning, in Madrid, that you would be wearing a cloak, I presume?"

"I was in my mantle, indeed, my lord," replied Ruy, unable to catch the drift of this questioning, which much more resembled the interrogation by the Minister of Police than the conversation of a Secretary and his varlet.

"Consequently, there would be nobody in the palace who saw you clad in this livery of mine?"

"None—as yet, and nobody in the town," said the lacquey with a kind of dull gratification.

"That is excellently well," observed Don Sallusto, letting his head sink a little in thought.

Seeing that the door by which Don Cæsar had left the saloon was not closely shut, he pointed out the omission to Ruy, who went and closed it tightly, and drew the curtain before it.

"Since the sun is risen, how warm it is," continued the Marquis. "You may leave off that coat."

With a rapid hand, Ruy stripped off the hateful garment and flung it upon the nearest chair. He had not received an order yet in all his time of ten months' service which he executed with more gladness and alacrity; and Don Sallusto smiled to himself at the betrayal of emotion.

"It seems to me that your handwriting is fine and fair," he went on, in the same unctuous voice. "Show me the hand," he added, pointing to a side table on which were not only paper, silk, wax and pens, but a jewel of an inkdish in jade and copper which an Emperor of Cathay might have given to the Prince Navigator himself.

Ruy went and sat at the desk and wrote a chance line, which the Secretary inspected approvingly.

"Yes, that will pass!" he said. "From this day forward, you shall serve me as secretary. As for composition, let us try a shaft of Cupid—for, truly, I do not wish to conceal anything from you. Ministers are

but men; and the blind god catches Señor Gravity in the very Hall of the Council. My queen of love—is—is—well, Donna Praxedis—a peri, though she has wandered far from the pearly gates, between ourselves. Stay, I will dictate:—

"'A dreadful danger impends over my head; a tempest which my queen alone can dispel, by coming to meet me in my private house this evening. Otherwise, I am ruined! My life, and my soul, and my heart I lay at your feet, which I kiss.'"

He interrupted himself with a laugh.

"A 'danger' you will notice. In fact, that is not at all a bad trick to allure her into my nest. I am experienced in these matters, although you may have supposed that I am not one of the credulous crew who believe that with the end of the century, the end of the world approaches! Who knows if we have ten years before us—even one? Be that as it may; to resume. Women, mark you, are very fond of saving those who really are their ruin. By way of equipoise, they generally ruin those who seek to save them. Well, add as the postscriptum—

"'You can enter in the night time by the door at the end of the hornbeam avenue, without fear of being recognized. A man devoted to me will open it to you.'"

Taking up the paper, he heedfully scrutinized it; the writing was elegant; perhaps, more clear than would have suited the hand used to the sword, *mignon's* fan or dice box, but it became a secretary.

"Upon my honour, it is perfect," he replied, as he let the sheet float down upon the table. "There is nothing lacking but the signature."

Ruy held out the pen.

"Nay, nay, you sign."

"Your name, my lord?" protested the scribe, in a greater surprise than he had felt at the sober statesman revealing the rosy satin lining to the sable robe of State.

"No, no—sign my borrowed name for adventures of gallantry,—the illustrious bald-head and conqueror's—Cæsar's!"

Ruy affixed the name to the letter, and was folding it in one of the fantastic and interlocked shapes in vogue, and which he had learned in the Charity House where the students read Ovid oftener than Plato.

"But the lady cannot tell the writing," he objected.

"Ah!" reflectively. "Pah! the seal will be enough," rejoined Don Sallusto; "and I often address her in these terms."

He took the *billet doux* into his own keeping.

"I shall myself clap on the directions," he subjoined; and walking about the room, he looked to see if (with the exception of the ancestral portrait) any of his own belongings remained unpacked.

"Ruy," said he, when his investigation bore no result, "I am going from here this evening, but I shall leave you in town. My projects as regards you are those of a most sincere friend." Eyeing him significantly, he concluded, "I aim to make you happy."

"What are you seeking, my lord?" inquired the other, having silently bowed by way of thanks, so great was his stupefaction at what was occurring, and noticing that his benefactor was again peering about.

"They were to bring me a new sword."

"Here is one, my lord, under this hat," replied the servant, "with its baldric complete."

The watching man remarked the glint of venturesome pleasure in Ruy's glance at the handsome scarf, the silk of which was not only embroidered but painted in an over-

laden taste, but the latest one. The material was delightfully soft to the touch; but as the youth obeyed the master's gesture, and brought him the scarf and the weapon, it was the latter that he dandled tenderly and admiringly. It warranted wonder, this flower of the swordsmith's art, which was carried to the extreme at this epoch, when steel was chiselled like ivory in Indian hands. The handle terminated in a ball, hollowed out and useful for holding poison or sweetmeats—to reward the kind sweetheart or punish the cruel!

When the Marquis held them, he also admired them; but abruptly he passed the baldric over the head and upon the shoulder of Ruy as if to see the effect upon him.

It was greater than he had perhaps anticipated, for he bit his lip in a sort of spite; the poor student and lacquey had the air of a born sword-bearer, a veteran nobleman of the Court.

The interview with Don Cæsar and these tests of the capability of Ruy Blas had consumed some time, and as a clock in the gallery rang its silvery bell, the Secretary started.

"Hark! it is the hour for the Queen-Consort to be passing back to her rooms. Someone is coming here—it should be my dear Marquis del Basto! No!"—as he detached his own mantle and drew it upon the astounded youth's shoulders, "I will open the door."

With his own hands, he left the gallery entrance free, and it was seen to be crowded by the courtiers and the chief officials, who flocked into the Secretary's suite with the two-fold end of seeing how he bore his dismissal, which had been widely noised through the palace, and to accomplish their duty of bearing him away to the end of the corridor, where he should hail the Queen, if even for the last time, in their ranks.

Bewildered, utterly unable to comprehend for what purpose the grave and stately Marquis allowed him to mingle with the hidalgoes and grandees, Ruy gazed on the Lord High Steward whom Finlas led up to his *protégé*.

"Marquis," commenced he, with unruffled brow and bland accents, as if he soared still in the ether of royal favour, "suffer me to present to your grace my cousin Don Cæsar, the Count of Garofa-by-Velalcazar."

"Great heavens!" was the mental appeal of Ruy at this amazing ascription of a lofty title to himself. He understood less and less.

"Silence," whispered Don Sallusto in his tingling ear, while the Marquis del Basto, an old appendage of the Court, who would have received the ape that played chess with the King of India without demur if only it were properly presented, mumbled that he was delighted, and groped for Ruy Blas' hand, which the latter surrendered to him with an embarrasment not so very out of place in one who was yet young.

"Let things take their course," whispered Don Sallusto again. "Bow to his lordship."

Luckily, Spain is a land where courtesy, early and everywhere, exercises a tyranny; and at school the student had learnt to bow low and gracefully even to the satisfaction of the father inspector, a potentate who exacted more than a newly made cardinal. Keen and captious judges although the courtiers were, none of them condemned the manner in which the suddenly revived Count of Garofa made reverence to the Steward.

Pleased at this respect, the latter smiled, and observed, kindly—

"I remember the lady your mother well, and I highly esteemed her. But," he went on to Don Sallusto,

"has he not greatly changed? I declare that I should barely have recognized him."

"Pooh, pooh! after ten years of absence, my lord!" muttered the Marquis.

"That is true; ten years from the Court! I wonder not that he is changed, but that he survived it." And the old noble, who knew no sun but royalty, dolefully sighed.

"But he is home again," cried the Secretary, merrily, as he clapped his hand on the shoulder of Ruy Blas, to drive away the last vestige of his stupor at being the cynosure of these satellites whom he had so heartily admired and envied from afar. "Do you not remember what a rogue of a prodigal he was? how he scattered the sequins as lightly as the Grand Seignior tosses the handkerchief to a bayadere? Every evening he made us young bloods dance to the lute of Apollo; and on the artificial lake in his palace grounds, a hundred musicians gave a water concert, like as many Arions on their dolphins! Was there ever an hour without its gala, masquerade, and devilry? With these flashes of pleasure's lightning he dazzled Madrid; and—in three years was ruined. But he is a true lion, who knows not defeat. You behold him come home with the Indian galleons—the gold ships from Peru; and a goodly portion of the freight is Garofa's!"

A murmur of envy and felicitations arose around the still embarrassed Don Cæsar.

"Señor," he began, with none-know-what blunder on his untrained lips, white as bleached wax.

"Say 'Cousin,' as of old," returned Don Sallusto, gaily, as if himself rejuvenated by the advent of the idol regilded, "for we Bazans have always been frank gentlemen, meseems. The Count of Garofa and the Marquis of Finlas are but two stems from the same tree, and of the same worth. On the side of the distaff, too, Cæsar, we are equals, for you come of Arragon and I of Portugal. If I am the fruit of one branch, you are the flower of the other!"

"Exquisitely put," said the royal chaplain, a rare constructor of *concetti* and complimentary *motos*, while the recipient of the compliment wondered whither they were leading him—to be slaughtered after blinding him with the garland of flowers?

He was delivered from the Marquis del Basto, who was recounting a malicious anecdote of the Lady of Garofa, whom he had pretended to value highly, but, on the other hand, Ruy was accosted by an older nobleman, who wore a full-bottomed wig and had snowy moustachios, and leant on the arm of an obliging friend.

"You explain matters very well," he observed to Don Sallusto, in a quavering voice. "Being your cousin, he is also mine!"

"Exactly, Marquis. Let me present him to you, therefore. Don Cæsar, you see Don Alvar de Bazan, of Benavidez, the Marquis of Santa Cruz, who was the right-hand man of Don Juan when he would have invaded England, to rescue from her dungeon Mary Queen of Scots. Ah! the Londoners little dream what they escaped when the valiant son of Charles V. launched not the Armada which would, more assuredly than King Don Philip's, have sailed up the Thames. Santa Cruz planting his banner on the Tower! nothing less! Alas, a lofty project, but a dead one! Still, better a live lord than a dead project! Yes, Cæsar is among us again!"

"I——I imagine that it was false that he—he was dead," stammered the old noble, staring at the presented one, who could not get out a

word even as feebly as the Marquis spoke his.

"Certainly!"

"Where did you say he returns from?"

"The Golden Americas," was the response, loudly.

"I should say so," said Santa Cruz.

"You recognize him?" asked the Secretary of the Council, with some earnestness.

"I think I would! Why, I saw him at his birth!" For the old gentleman was going blind, but fought against even self-admission of the defect, and hastened to give his corroboration, in order to testify at the same time to the goodness of his sight. "He could not have grown up a handsomer springald. I am delighted to see you again!" he cried, shaking the trembling hand of the orphan inundated with relatives all at once.

Drawing the Marquis aside, Don Sallusto whispered to him, in that key which makes a whisper at Court audible as the herald's best note:

"He has the riches to cancel his old scores, or, faith of my fathers! I will pay them. Now, you can serve him in your post by finding him some Court office vacant at the time—or, hark ye, we'll create one. Ha, ha, ha! Attached to the King or the Queen, it little matters, for it strikes me that this time they are one."

"Well, well! he is a charming young fellow."

"And one of the family! You have complete credit in the Council of Castile, so I recommend him to you."

This was the model of his ingenious presentation of the ghost of the prodigal to the principal nobles. The title of one alone struck the still confounded Ruy as not wholly unfamiliar, although he did not clearly remember at first the incident in which it had figured. He was soon to be enlightened, but to a degree which brought the colour back into his cheeks.

The Secretary had accosted a gay young noble, in a splendid doublet, worked with seed pearls upon a Genoa velvet of "damask upon damask," which was the ecstasy of the others of his age. It was "The Count of Alba."

"What a glorious doublet, my lord," ejaculated Don Sallusto. "It would seem that your ships have come home from the Philippines, or your tenants returned to the plough after their little outbreak!"

"Yes, it is not so bad for a Mantuan tailor," returned the Count. "Ah, but you should have seen the one far handsomer that I wore at the town's reception of the Queen last year! Rose satin, with golden ribbons—that knave, Matalobos, robbed me of it!"

"Robbed you, my lord! Then he had all his band with him!"

"Sooth to say, I did not let him despoil me without a thrust in tierce for it. But, what can you do when the banditti have the soldiers of the garrison in league with them, and when you call out 'watch!' they hold a man whilst the villains strip him to the shirt? But I complained to the Queen, my lords, and Her Majesty, shocked that there should be collusion between the soldiers of Madrid and the footpads, had the Aytona Regiment sent out to Cuba to learn to strip tobacco leaves, and not noblemen."

Matalobos! the Count of Alba! the dazzling vest which Zafari wore! Had Ruy joined that brace of adventurers, he might now be identified by the unfortunate exquisite, and a greater shame descend upon him than he felt at his assent by silence to this transmigration into the social state of his madcap friend. But he had had time to recover from so

great a surprise, and he was on the point, come what might, of repudiating the assumption and exposing the machinator before his associates, who would be only too glad to see this new trait of his villainy laid bare, ere he went into banishment. At that instant, however, there was heard the measured tramp of the Queen's guard at the end of the gallery and all—Don Sallusto, Santa Cruz, Alba, Del Basto, in a word, the whole group surrounding Ruy Blas, flowed up the corridor, carrying him irresistibly with them. It was the Queen-Consort who was coming, and the ushers invited the officials to take their places, prescribed with that precision which caused Spanish etiquette to be the pattern in European Court ceremonials. More eager than ever to flee, Ruy sought breathlessly for an egress, but Don Sallusto stole to his side, and in a stern undertone bade him—

"Rouse, rouse thee! Must I reproach you for your wit weakening as your prospect enlarges? I am leaving Madrid, but I hand over to you my private residence by the bridge where you have dwelt, keeping nothing except the master-key. The dumb slaves remain also to carry out your orders. Mine own you will in due time receive. As you execute my will, I shall make your fortune. Ascend! fear nothing, for the hour is timely! The Court is a country where one travels in a fog and you can reach the goal blindfolded. I will keep the lookout for you."

"The Queen, my lords! the Queen!" called out the ushers, and the cry made Ruy's heart, momentarily frozen by the cynicism of his adviser's speech, throb and start on again fiercely.

What! Should he who had prayed in his loneliness for a tithe of the opportunity which was now liberally given him, draw back when he stood upon the threshold of realization? Welcome the chance of seeing *her* whom he had despaired to behold even afar off, no matter who pulled aside the curtain. Why should he repudiate his borrowed plumes when they came from one who would have lent them to him, and had offered, indeed, to share his all with him?—for dull as he was at this moment, while stunned by his immense good fortune, he had but to remember the incident of the stolen vest and Don Sallusto's manner towards Zafari to divine who the latter was at bottom. Don Cæsar would not have grasped this chance to reinstate himself and redeem a tarnished title: he was too indolent, too careless. He had accommodated himself to the low level to which he had fallen. He would rail at his cousin for being ambitious and powerful, while his impersonator doubted not that under the mantle of the Golden Fleece he should bear himself as became a grandee. He would not squander his income on grooms, cooks, and the dancers in the ballet of *Atalanta*; he would not ruin himself before this grand monarchy met the desolation of Palmyra. Under the hat of the Count of Garofa—for, like the other grandees who had the privilege of covering their heads in the presence of royalty, he donned the beaver which Don Sallusto had thoughtfully brought and tendered him—he determined to be Cæsar, and not to return to the state of nothingness which had tortured him too long.

In another moment, the bevy of the maids of honour swept by, and then appeared, within arm's reach, a resplendent vision: the young Queen, fairer than before, for she was paler, magnificently apparelled, and with her golden hair free, not needing the crown piously laid aside during the mass, advanced, under a canopy of scarlet velvet,

carried by four gentlemen of the Royal Chamber; pages and guards marched afterwards.

The Queen was very human, most womanly, and she glanced, from a slight but lovely form, with a coppery skin, a little behind her by her side, —the Indian of discord—to where she expected to see either Don Sullusto, suppliant and conquered, or his vacant place, to show that he had fled, still more thoroughly defeated. To her astonishment, but not her disappointment, she beheld an entirely strange figure, and more than one remarked (although all passed so swiftly that the progress was not perceptibly checked) how her eyes were fastened, like the fawn's on the hunter, upon the face of Don Cæsar of Bazan.

The courtiers added themselves to the end of the train, and all disappeared within the Ambassadors' Hall, save Ruy, who still stood spellbound. When he looked round he was completely alone—which was all the more singular since he had attracted the attention of the rising power. But, though the plotter who had placed him in the centre of the imbroglio had vanished, it seemed to the tempted one that his voice echoed in the corridor from the marble walls, painted ceiling, and granite floor.

"Do what you can to please that woman and win her!"

If Don Sallusto imagined that the first step of his *protégé* in this direction was now, and thus, taken under his sole impulses, it was he who was blind of the two.

Ruy had already done much to please the Queen—perchance, much towards winning her without prompting.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FORGET-ME-NOT.

When the forlorn and isolated foundling was led by Don Sallusto from the flood and its murmuring voice that harmonizes too well with the disconsolate, and heightens the siren call of Suicide, he could not stifle some movement of gratitude. As they returned towards the happy town, blazing like a Burning City of the Plain, but not lugubriously, he felt that he had not drained the cup of life, and that even the dregs might contain some grain that was wholesome and fortifying.

The Secretary used no more words, apparently content with the pledge of allegiance and, stopping at a small stone house inclosed, in a high wall which also comprised a garden, he opened a door in this inclosure and, as even here the vast bonfire made other lights superfluous, guided Ruy through the grounds into the dwelling. In the sitting room a silver lamp was burning, and its rays fell on a large well filled bookcase and comfortable furniture. A gong was sounded, at the lengthened boom of which two negroes came in by a secret door. The Marquis explained that they were mutes whom a Spanish vessel had captured on the way to the Grand Turk's palace, and instructed their new master in the language of signs which they obeyed.

In this tranquil home the young man stayed for two months, reading and studying delightedly, for his patron seemed to have divined not only his literary wants, but the peculiar veins of instruction in which his most secret ambition longed to burrow. Above all there were manuscripts revealing secrets of statecraft, and while he learned for the first time the inner history of the countries, rivals then and ere long to be Spain's superior or conqueror, he could trace upon the lines of truth how the car of State, strong, easily gliding and laden with treasure in the golden age of Philip II., had in a hundred years become rickety, rusty and nearly emptied; the conductors, too, had changed from heroes and sages to schemers, pillagers and poltroons.

In a quarter of a year, Ruy became a politician—better, a statesman, for he saw, despite the glamour of his powerful patriotism, for he was a Spaniard in the first place — why the Colossus of the south had lost its grasp in the Low Countries and the high seas, and would lose the two Americas. All the masked contradictions no longer perplexed him, but made him grieve and burn to delay the doom. The religion more Catholic than in Rome itself; the richest treasury in Europe dependent on the typhoon sparing the Indian fleet; the Christian King more absolute than the Sultan; the descendant of Germans and Italians urged by a spirit more African than the Moors' whom his forefathers expelled; and the people, mere labourers in sufferance on the land, belonging entirely to Crown, Court and Clergy, dying of want on the plains, of cold in the mountains and in bread riots in the towns.

He thanked Don Sallusto, what-

ever his motive, for saving a life he had all but thrown, unutilized, away, and for giving his youthful fury an opportunity to become tempered. He saw that patience was the foundation of the wall that was meant to stand, and courage but the coping-stone which ornaments and protects all beneath.

"I will serve my country!" he exclaimed one day.

His father would have said, "I will serve the King!" This was an advance of a century, not of a generation.

After all, what kind of a King was Charles II. to serve? The secret memoirs which Don Sallusto placed in Ruy's reach portrayed him mentally with that relentless surgical skill and clearness of the secret envoys of the Spanish and the Venetian States. The poor scholar knew what the courts of London, Versailles and Vienna only suspected—that the wretched scion of the race of Juana the Mad was like the prince of the Arabian Tales—turning to bone, if not marble, a spiritless anatomy of a man.

"An imbecile—a fool—an old man at thirty!" cried Ruy, indignant at having such a representative, "unfit to live, still less to reign. Of a fading family; for his father was so debilitated that he could not hold the block carved with his sign-manual to stamp the name inspiring no longer awe, but distrust. What a wretched deed to give the hand of a fair young woman to this decrepit Charles!"

And leaving the house, which he could always do in the daytime, when Don Sallusto never used it, he would wander around the royal palaces where was lodged alternately the beauty whom he had welcomed in the public name to Madrid.

He had had enough of reading; it was time to act.

In a week, he became as fully informed on the hourly life of the King and Queen as the heads of their separate households. In neither case was the discovery agreeable. King Don Carlos, seeming to recover from the joy of the marriage as if it were a shock as painful as that of the grief at his first wife's death, and drawing no consolation this time from the priests when the Queen-mother was carried, in her turn, into the vault of the Escurial,—that palace-mausoleum,—passed all his time in hunting wild animals or before the dens in his menagerie. Still, he was the son of the eagle, and his name was only breathed among the masses in terror, and the Court gazed on him with trembling and served on bended knee.

Still, too, he exercised uncontrolled power, and could command even, "Off with his head!" to the grandee to whom "Hats off!" might not be said, a signal privilege which courtiers all over the world vainly coveted. Any freak of this invalid monarch was an event, for the sceptre of Spain yet cast a shadow upon half the world.

Alone again, since he shunned the young wife, he shut himself up, with the national gravity, in a dread-inspiring and impenetrable majesty, cloaking his own alarm and perturbation at the despotism with which he was charged. Despotism which is useful, expedient, and sometimes needed, when genius sways the rod, oppressed this mediocre weakling. The wine of the strong head is poison to the sick. He replaced the sceptre of Charles V., indeed, with the whip of the dog-breaker—that of the lion-tamer being too dangerous a weapon—and laid aside the most important official papers with a listless, "I will see about it," which disheartened those who still dreamt of a regeneration of Spain.

As for the unhappy partner of this petrifaction slightly vivified, she lost almost all hope of resisting the chagrin of neglect, the onerous irritations of solitude, and the grim demon of etiquette which had stifled even the gay and volatile Frenchwoman, her predecessor. In the palace, she let the Indian girl amuse her with her parrot-like facility in babbling English, French, Spanish, and the conglomerate language of the seas of the buccaneers; she witnessed her weird native dances and the tricks taught her on the voyages, and tired of them all; she would have let her fall out of the circle, as queens let playthings drop and be shattered in the mire, but the parallel in their condition—both afar from home among strangers who did not wish to sympathize with them or understand them, as well as the true devotion of Casilda, retained her in favour. The young girl had the sharp wit of a savage, and baffled the spies and *guarda-reynas* with a success that made her mistress smile, as rarely was her habit. She devised a hundred indisputable reasons for excursions beyond the austere and darksome prison palaces into the country, in search of that brilliant jewel called "the key of the fields."

Ruy hoped that in these jaunts chance would aid the realization of his mad hope to see the Queen at less distance, and even to hear her speak. But, unfortunately, the blunderbuss of the landless peasant seemed in every bush; the princes warred with one another because of straying cattle and trodden down grain, and even the convents fought by the intermediary of Swiss *reiters* and English free-lances. The shepherds, perched safely on the crags above the unpaid royal guards, barefoot, in rags, and only armed with the dagger they brought from home, jeered at them, and even insulted the Queen in her mule-carried litter. For the bravest soldiers were kept by the King for his boar hunts, and the guards of his Consort were warriors by and for intrigue alone.

Queen Maria Anna could not have yielded to this restriction with more distaste than Ruy felt; but he, like her, saw the imperative nature of it. The reasoning was excellent that the newcomer should see the realm where she was to reign; but, unfortunately, the peasants who toiled on it, and were not interested in it, colleagued with the highwaymen to make trespassers pay tribute. To put a Queen of Spain to ransom seemed a wild project, but there were daredevils in the gorges of the Guadarrama who would have attempted it. Ruy shuddered at the prospect, and resigned himself to see his idol only within the town.

But, in plain earnest, here it was no better.

Profound misery and the profound rancour which it generated, set one half the population against the other. The traders defended their property with apprentices, cudgel in hand, though they came out only to take down the bullet-proof shutters; and each noble filled his porter's lodge with a hundred bravoes, who made Madrid another Babel with their medley of jargons—Genoese, Sardinian, or Flemish. Zafari was not visible, but it was almost surely he who had suggested to his dear friend Matalobos that corporation of cutpurses and cutthroats who bribed the magistrates regularly, daunted the watch, and added to their ranks in their night marches the unsteady soldier who had leave and sought to amuse himself. The captain appeared in the day-time, escorted by a guard like a baron, and, before it was dark, stopped the procession that carried the jewelled portrait of the Archduke of Austria like that of a

saint, under an embroidered canopy, and dug the gems out of the frame with his own poignard; then he leisurely returned it and let the cavalcade and its four alcades, the daïs-bearers, go on their way. The priests feared that he would stop the saints in their promenades. He had deprived the President of the Council of a curious death's-head watch near the busy Bridge of Toledo; and Ruy mentally agreed with the Queen's custodians that her walks in the capital should be few, not far, and taken without notification overnight.

Many afternoons, however, he saw her go to the nunnery of the Sisters of the Rosary, in the street of Ortaleza. They had a preceptress who knew the Mexican tongue and undertook to instruct Casilda. The Queen, eager to escape from her thraldom, or at least, to break the monotony by a change out of one cage into another, accompanied her favourite. These frequent glimpses, in a narrow street, where the halberdiers could not drive the bystanders farther back than the wall, augmented the lunacy in Ruy's brain. The vertigo seized him at the full sight of the fair beauty whom the scorching sun only slightly gilded, and whom pallor, caused by her secluded life, made the more interesting. One day he noticed that she was sorrowful instead of simply sad; he decoyed one of her train into a wine shop, and learned that the Camerera Mayor had twisted the necks of the Queen's song-birds, brought from Germany, purely because they reminded the isolated foreigner of home. Ruy had the cover of Matalobos' favour, since Zafari had introduced him to that King of the Madrid underworld, and in a low resort of the muleteers, who informed the robber where they deposited their loads and what they contained—he bought a cage of northern warblers, and a superb African parrot that solemnly orated in German like a preaching canon of Strasburg, and sent them by one of his dumb slaves to Casilda. He left it to the Indian's wit to surmise what they were intended to replace. On another occasion the Queen's eyes were red, as if weeping had been her sole relief from rage and despair. This time the young man corrupted a gardener of the Buen Retiro, and drinking with him until he fell under the table of the "Towers" tavern, he added largely to his store of knowledge of the ins and outs of the royal grounds. In particular, he heard that within those walls so high that he had not been able to see over them, and the Queen could not see beyond, strict orders had been carried out not to allow a plant to grow to remind her of her fatherland. Moreover, some pots of a little blue flower (which the gardener could not name, but which he described with the minute details of those delvers who know a root in its every fibre) that the Queen cherished as having come from Bavaria, had been wantonly allowed to die. Ruy recognized in the gardener's description the forget-me-not of German legend, and despite the assurance of the man that it did not grow in Spain, he set out on a search for it. For a long time it seemed undiscoverable, and many evenings the searcher arrived home after a day spent in clambering about the hills, and especially prying about the ponds at their foot, exhausted and despairing. Finally, he perceived the *Vergissmeinnicht* at Caramanchel, in a lagoon, amid watercress and rushes. Day after day he would proceed to this spot and collect the blooms for a nosegay, its principal component the tiny azure flower which was so dear to the ex-

patriated Queen. The piece of folly did not end here. To leave those bouquets at the palace-gate for Casilda was not satisfactory after so many pains and such fatigue: he desired almost to place them in the royal hands.

It was a more thorny problem than that which he had given up, and Don Sallusto had solved for him—this of Love famished, after that of Life distressed.

The King was always absent, but he had left a watcher more passionately faithful than is common, in the Master of the Queen's Household, Don Gaspar Guritan Tassis y Guevarra, Count of Oñate, a noble of distinguished ability and high character, but who had fallen into a moroseness, attributed to remorse at the severity with which his sway as Viceroy at Naples in 1648 had been marked. His father was the worst opponent of Olivarez, and he himself had been no inconsiderable politician, as successful conduct against the wily Italians when Ambassador at Rome had manifested. But he had become sullen, timid, and so sad that the report was current that he purposed giving up his position and retiring among the Carthusians.

As his latest act in his political and Court career, he was chosen to represent his Sovereign at the espousals in Germany and the reception of the young Queen at Valladolid. A great change immediately appeared. The Court jesters whispered that the new cheese tempted the old rat into coming out of the obscurity he was seeking, and as Zafari said to his friend, gossip was not slow to assert that Oñate had let himself be enthralled by his bland and blonde ward. But in a stilted, old fashioned, Platonic manner, worthy of those knights-errant who rambled among giants and ogres so long that on their return to their Dulcineas they found them married and mothers of large families.

The jesters and gossips could only joke and laugh, for she never so much as tossed him an encouraging word, as though she doubted that a heart could be under his breastplate, and that the fruit is the more tender when the rind is old and hard. She openly pronounced him tedious, and laughed heartily, an act beginning to be infrequent in her, at the sight of a caricature of the noble by a pupil of El Mudo. It depicted him, tall, white, bony, and not graceful, as a heron, standing ruefully by the pool and waiting all day for a miserable gudgeon.

Nevertheless, ridiculous as he may have appeared to critics in his old age, who did not know in what cold-bloodedness he had executed the Neapolitans by thousands, and what bravery still supported his soldierly bearing—he kept scrupulously attentive guard about the treasure of his King's hearth. When Ruy prowled around the high brick walls, with the posy on his bosom, prying into every crevice for foothold to reach the coping, he ran a perilous risk of meeting some archer who would pin it to his heart with the thrust of a partisan. Oñate seemed never to repose, and the watch was excellent in the night as by day.

Spite of all, as midnight approached, the daring youth would elude these sentinels, leap up to the iron spikes bristling on the parapet and draw himself through the points, to drop down within the sacred precincts.

Still and deserted when thus he visited the grounds, formally laid out and more suitable to a monastery than a royal resort, the savour of forbidden fruit gave them a charm sufficient to repay him for his venture. Long would he rove where she had roved—through the groves where the birds were asleep; over

the path upon which the snails traced glistening, indecipherable lines; and to the bowers where he believed echoes still lingered of the regulated laughter of the maids of honour, and the poems, as stiff and forced, of the licensed poets. Never here were heard the merry lays and free jests of voluptuous courts, but subdued prayers and hollow canticles of the rulers who retaliated for the loss of a town or state by holding *autos da fé*.

The darkness, the solitude and the danger combined to make one who encountered them feel rather like a thief than a lover. Yet he strode the abandoned alleys like a king, and exhaled his sighs in the prim arbours of the gardens laid out in the mathematical style of Le Nôtre, with a freedom surprising to himself, till some warning sound awoke him from his amorous reverie.

Often would he pause and look up at the sombre and unlighted palace, with shutters and curtains to every casement. To him, the windows were peopled, and confusedly he saw the royal shades of three generations staring down on this presumptuous glow-worm who dared to adore a star—a star in their own constellation, too.

At last, he would find a marble seat in an alcove under the orange-trees, where he had no doubt the lonely one passed the siesta, pining for the home of happy days where the forget-me-not grew thickly along the Danube, of which it reflected the celestial hue. He would lay the bunch of flowers on the seat, sometimes under a fan or kerchief or book forgotten, and reluctantly hasten away over the wall. Several narrow escapes in and outside the gardens, when the janissaries made their rounds and the night was not moonless, and awkward wrestlings with the chevaux-de-frise on the parapet failed to teach him wisdom, and his caution did not grow apace with his passion.

On the evening of the day when Don Sallusto had condescended to recollect him and order him to enter the palace where the stupefying transformation awaited him, Ruy confessed to himself that his expeditions could no longer be accomplished with impunity. Moreover, the Marquis of Santa Cruz, eager to place his young *protégé* in the current without delay, urged him to go as soon as he could to the Duke of Pastrana, in attendance on the King in the hunting-residence of Aranjuez. Beside the King were a thousand chances of opening his career.

If he meant to pay a farewell visit to his shrine of love, it was compulsory to do so that night. He prepared to make it one explaining whence had come the floral tributes, and why they would come no more. At last he had the *entrée* at Court, and he might without concealment, although under disguise, stand in the same room as his idol, nay, prostrate himself at her feet and openly offer up his devotions. Joy! to breathe the same air as she, and perhaps, like the youths of the Court, whom by nature and the plumes of Don Cæsar he so closely resembled, he might kiss her hand, look up into her eyes, and win a glance not wholly cold and disdainful. What if, for his presumption, he was slaughtered like a Rizzio at her feet! He felt superior to lute player as well as fop, and he was convinced that he would die crossing steel, or while a patriotic or national idea, worthy to be coupled with his exalted flame, should fill his brain.

Impressed with the feeling that at last Fate had remembered him, and proudly regarding Don Sallusto as its tool, so that he neither thanked him, nor was inclined to renounce the mask he had furnished, Ruy

returned to the site of temptation, after a ride out for the flowers, with a sudden resolve to use prudence, as if his life were no longer valueless.

To the nosegay he added, for the first time, a few lines, which he owned to be absurdly inadequate, but which his exaltation prevented him from improving upon. It is not given to a charity foundling every day to write a love letter to a queen, and he certainly had no models before him.

Prudence was, indeed, demanded.

This time the guard was doubled, and a revolving cylinder, studded with cutting prongs, was freshly mounted at the spot where he had generally made his entrance. His visits were more than suspected, it was clear; they were expected, and he tarried amid the spikes for a long time, before daring to let himself fall where a trap might yawn, with its steel jaws. When he risked himself, he caught his sleeve in one of the trenchant and unyielding points, and a strip of skin came away with the ruffles; but he could not cry out, and had even to bind up the wound as he hurried on. To swoon from loss of blood, and to be found dying here, within the inclosure reserved for the Queen, would be her ruin as surely as his own doom to death. The Queen is so sacred in Spain that even to snatch the jewelled crown off the Virgin in the Cathedral were less heinous than to touch her hand, though it were to draw her out of a fatal danger.

He had hidden the note in the flowers, and he laid them in the old place, where, his heart told him, his gifts reached the intended one. This assurance had emboldened him to commit his crowning enormity in the series of follies never before entertained by Spanish brain, far less acted by loyal Spaniard.

The deed was not completed too soon, for he heard, by the guard-house in the bastion at the north-east corner of the palace, the rattle of the iron bound watch lanterns being hung on the hooked axe of the partizans, and the baying of the dogs, chafing at being restrained. He turned and fled, bounded upon the salient stone which had usually been his halfway station, and thence grasped the turning axle of spikes. By a miracle he drew himself up, insinuated his slender body between the points, and dropped on the farther side. On his last look behind, he had dimly discerned lights in the grounds and a couple of fawn coloured Pyrenean dogs, large as lionesses, upon the main path which he had so lately crossed. These bayed like mad things, no doubt scenting the blood which the heat and the exertion had made to ooze through the hasty bandage.

Still, he had succeeded in the escalade.

In another moment the outside watch appeared, part at one end, part at the other of the wall; but, leaping among the dark shrubs and crossing the ditch, he darted down one of the narrow passages where only the adherents of Matalobos ventured after nightfall, and soon could rejoice in his safety. When he reached the door of the little house, although tired, faint from loss of blood, and blaming the recklessness, which, perhaps, had injured his idol, it was solely this latter apprehension which pained him.

He was not so imprudent as to go out at all the next morning, but on the second day, proceeding to a tavern in the Calle Mayor, where the palace under-servants came to meet their rustic relatives, he heard that there had been a great stir in the gardens. Matalobos, no longer content with scouring the streets, or even with racking the money-lender's

house at the sign of the "Shield of Lombardy," had mocked at the new chevaux-de-frise from Antwerp, and alighted within the proscribed limit. It was but a righteous judgment on him that the King's giant *alans* had torn him a trifle, for there were drops of blood on the flower-bed under the weather-stone of the wall, and a bloody hand might be seen impressed on the grey stone. After this warning, the wall would be heightened and the watch spurred into redoubled vigilance, or woe to the delinquent! The Count of Oñate spoke of whips and dungeons, and as for the Terror of the Town, this time he had outrun the tether—the wheel would receive him as soon as caught. Better take to the *Montana*—the wilderness!

But, in fine, had the declaration of love reached its goal? Ruy was lost in hopes and conjectures as he rode out of town at an early hour. It was not only mental anguish which racked him, but the troublesome gash in the left wrist, which might have been of little consequence had it been properly and speedily dressed. But he dared not consult a surgeon, with the news of the intrusion in the Buen Retiro become the topic of the town. The heat of the road aggravated its pain, and he had to bathe it in the icy brook before he was ten miles out. It was easy, then, to tell a story of running the gauntlet of Matalobos' *escopetas*.

He had not even the consolation of knowledge that the Queen had duly received the forget-me-nots. When they exchanged the glance on his standing among the Bazans, in apparel befitting his youth, comeliness and ambition, hers did not reveal a scintilla to light a hope. They were still strangers.

CHAPTER IX.

CROWN OF THORNS.

At the touch of Don Sallusto, on the last day of his lost power, all doors had been opened to their full extent to the pretended Don Cæsar of Bazan. The Marquis of Santa Cruz had at once insinuated him into a humble post which served adequately as the first in a line of stepping-stones, and he made great strides across the stream which is smooth near both banks but terrible midway, and with a crumbling brink to arrive upon. Society remembered with a faintly reproving smile the reprobate who had been the greatest featherbrain that the moon had ever seen born. At the worst, he had ruined himself in a princely fashion, and by a fancy to change boon companions daily, as he did his coach and horses, he had devoured his capital, as he would have done the revenue of Peru, in a brief space. But the Sanchos of the drawing rooms had excuses in their satchel of compliments: they repeated that Magdalen in her decline becomes a saint, and the Merry Andrew a stern sage in his old age. Everything was pardonable in the reformed prodigal who had found an ear of golden grain or two among the husks of the South American manger.

Nevertheless, the experienced courtiers who undertook to advance him were too cunning to make haste quickly: instead of setting him up prominently in Madrid to have his defects pecked at, they attached him to the suite of the Duke of Pastrana, a familiar of the King's, and it was to report himself to this functionary that Ruy, spite of the wound which required rest, urged on his strong horse under the June sun, towards the royal summer residence at Aranjuez, founded by Philip II.

If Matalobos had not wisely abandoned the town for the Sierra, other salteadors infested it. But in spite of the earnest adjuration of Santa Cruz, and the offer of Del Basto of a guard of horse, Don Cæsar took only a pair of serving-men with him, in confidence that he had a like talisman to pass unscathed through the ranks of the kings of the road to that the real Cæsar possessed. Ruy had no need to pay that toll to the robber without which few thought of quitting the capital; it was more certain than to fight the way clear with a squadron or a company of infantry. The brigand made war against the King.

No one assailed Ruy; he looked too mean a prey for the pillagers of peers, and they picked and chose their prey of late, becoming wealthy and dainty.

The solitary traveller gave full swing to his feelings and his reflections—the two main traits of the modern and civilized man. Upon the laying aside of the ponderous armour, the mind had expanded and become sensitive.

Three reigns before, the wayfarer would have idly contemplated the vast pastures, and only congratulated the realm on all the tillers having become soldiers and gone to lay their bones in distant battle grounds, but Ruy could have wept at the

desolation, for hundreds of sheep did not, in his eyes, compensate for the absence of the cottagers. In an earlier age he would have reverently bowed to the unwieldly Prince of the Church who languidly lifted his hand to bless, not to give to the beggar sharing the leaning milestone with the lizards. Ruy gazed after him rebukingly.

And this wilderness was the fertile, peopled region which had given its ruler four millions of gold crowns in 1615!

While the King was hunting wolves, the crowned wolves were hunting Spain, and like the doomed one whom their pack pursued, to gain a little time, she threw away her children to be devoured—Portugal and Brazil, Brisach, Steinfurt and La Comté, Goa, Ormuz and the Roussillon, Pernambuco, and the Blue Mountains!

The beggar whom he had passed, dozing in the shade, seemed a type of the wretched people who had yielded four hundred millions in twenty years, and were still pressed, not to redeem the indigence of the State, repair the fleet, recompense the army and self-recuperate, but to maintain those who indulged in ignoble pleasures. On the imperial purple which had become a rag, the poverty-stricken Spaniard grovelled like a lion eaten up in its den by vermin.

Aching at the heart, he used the spur and cantered on till, mirrored in the river, he saw the gaudy slate roofs and stone-faced brick walls of the pleasure resort of Philip rise before him, with the many weathercocks squeaking and grating on the pinnacles. Hawks and ravens hovered over the island in the stream, denoting the assemblage of game birds in the preserves, and flocks of small birds flitted here and there, enormous as a visitation of African locusts, so wasteful was the feeding of the royal pets.

Ruy rode through the town, laid out in the Flemish style, yet dirty as never a Dutch shambles would be; but the inhabitants were accustomed to the transits of peers with their large retinues, and the town officer hardly deigned to inform him that the Duke of Pastrana was in attendance on his Majesty, and that a hunt was in progress.

For that matter, as he made the circuit of the hunting pavilion, he could hear the winding of horns in the dense and untrimmed woods (succeeded by the regularly planted park visible to-day).

He alighted, and left his horse to be led into the stables by his man, since the royal servants did not recognize in the young gentleman, whose standing at Court was not defined, a right to command them; and, adjusting his sword and dagger not to interfere with the free action of his limbs, Ruy resolutely plunged under the interarching boughs.

Without practice in the noble art of the chase, luck aided him, for towards the first coppice, where he halted in doubt, the animal in flight, the dogs and the cavalcade twice passed him so swiftly that he had no time to distinguish the riders. But it seemed to him, on the second occasion, the pace being less good, that there was one hunter who was isolated and yet protected, so to say, by groups of three or four others, ready to throw themselves between him and the quarry if it should turn without warning.

This, then, was the King.

Knowing that he would find it difficult to excuse himself if he used his sword to beat off the wolfhounds, which might have rushed at him if he crossed the track, Ruy changed his intention to meet the Duke of

Pastrana at "the death," and began to retreat.

It was shifting from bramble to briar.

He had not taken six steps in the rough path through the thicket, before the ground gave way a little under him, and he was forced quickly to descend a slope, thickly covered with decayed leaves, and alight, as if shot out of a bombard, upon a paved court. An indescribable noise of shrieking, whistling, chattering, jabbering animals, a human voice, as he thought, piteously appealing, and malicious laughter, received him.

Half stunned by the abrupt stoppage to his slide, he just caught sight of half a dozen varlets running away as if the chase were at their heels. Their laughter was instantaneously silenced.

On rising and looking round, he found that he had descended into a pit paved with iron-like bricks, so carefully laid that they would certainly have defied the cunning and strength of a bear to pull them up. Before him, and on each hand, were large cages, solidly constructed of wood, plated with metal, their open fronts grated with gilded bars. In these long dens, stalked, with the unusual animation attributable to their hearing the uproar in the forest, handsome specimens of the larger carnivora.

Directly opposite him, however, a kind of Chinese pagoda arose in front of the lion house, and, while from within it a score of monkeys of all sizes and kinds momentarily stared and gibbered at the stranger, from its apex, a peak on a leaden roof, a shrill voice reiterated, half commandingly, half supplicating—

"Take me down!"

Ruy looked up and saw an odd little figure, suspended by its leather girdle to a meat-hook on the pagoda top. This miniature man (no bigger than the baboon that, now recovered from its fright, resumed its previous occupation of reaching for the hanging pigmy with a preposterously long arm and claw) was clad in a gorgeous and fantastic costume, and, under flaxen curls, exhibited a pretty doll-like face, which might well be charming when not convulsed with anger and terror.

"Take me down!" he said again, imperiously.

There was so much of the grimly ridiculous in his attitude (for at the least extension of his arms and legs, or the lowering of foot and hand, the monkeys made strenuous efforts to seize them, and had already played havoc with the lace at the wrist and the rosettes on the shoes) that Ruy longed to laugh, as the fugitives were doing when his sudden irruption spoilt their cruel sport.

"Take me down! It was the new Indian giantess did it, and I will have the King send her home to the Indies."

Insignificant as were the monkey tormentors of the dwarf—whom the newcomer recognized by the description often given to him of the King's favourite, Lovisillo—Ruy did not care to trust himself within their clutches.

Looking round he spied, leaning up against the den of the Bengal tigers, a pole with an iron point, a hook turned upward, than which no instrument could so perfectly help to carry out the design its sight suggested. In a moment he took this pole, spite of an angry growl from the striped monster, and, reaching up to the dangling deformity, he inserted the hook in the belt and lifted him off the iron horn. The apes screamed and flung malicious interjections in their own tongue at his deliverer, but already their escaped butt was lowered to the ground and set upon his feet.

Overwhelmed by the reaction into joy and the power to gratify his vindictiveness on the colossus who had placed him on the doubly dangerous eminence, the little Fleming sat down to rest for a moment, then, springing up, he squeaked, "I will make your fortune, young sir."

This time Ruy smiled, at the risk of undoing the good impression which he had made, but, luckily, it was not remarked by the susceptible dwarf. "I will make your fortune" was a stereotyped expression of his, and only too emphatically painted his influence over Charles, who more than once elevated a man at the instance of this puny adviser.

As the monkeys continued their outcries, perhaps even more loud and fierce from the emphasis of disappointment, the other animals caught the contagion, and presently there was such a tumult as might have risen on a stormy night in the hold of Noah's Ark.

Three or four burly men, with bestial faces, the sleeves of their woollen shirts under hide jerkins, rolled up, and showing brawny arms, ran in by an opening between the cages, and looked with surprise at the intruder.

"It is well," said the dwarf, laying his child-like hand patronizingly on the knee of Ruy; "this is a friend of mine. Where is my horse? and saddle me one for this gentleman—we will go find the King together, that I may present him, and have that great lubberly female blackamoor punished. Would you like to be knighted, my man?" continued he, looking up gravely in the liberator's face.

"I thank you—but I am already the Count of Garofa."

"A grandee! well, you shall be a duke!"

At the announcement of his station, which the simplicity of his travelling dress had not indicated, though his bearing confirmed it, the men had dropped their truculent manner, and two of them hurried away to carry the dwarf's orders to the stables with an alacrity testifying to his credit at Aranjuez.

"On second thoughts," said the manikin, more serious than ever, "we will say nothing about this indignity. But I shall present you to his Majesty with my recommendation, all the same. He never asks my reasons for my promotions, for he knows, doth our Charles, that where my heart and my wit are both concerned, there is nothing small about me."

In this sentence the speaker demonstrated a height of mind superior to that in most such epitomes of his kind, who remain blind to their inferiority in stature; and the tone, too, pleased the false Don Cæsar.

By this time, they had to quit the inclosure of the wild beasts, and at the clear space without, before the house of the keepers, a horse and the dwarf's pony, no larger than a mastiff, awaited them. The keepers were not the party which had laughed at the manikin in his distress; on the contrary they were full of regret, and the ill-assorted pair rode off in silence.

"The King is yonder," said the dwarf, all at once, pointing to the eastward. "It seems to me that they are on the island. Use your whip—come on!"

Exciting his little steed by whooping out loudly in his treble voice, he galloped into the forest along the riverside, picking out paths which it troubled Ruy to pass along without being hurled from the saddle by the low sweeping boughs. Luckily his new horse, one of a reserve for the hunting, had a hardened leather guard over its chest to protect it from the thorns, as well as Ruy's wounded arm, set aching again by his

having, in forgetfulness, used it to unhook the dwarf. It kept in the narrow way until two or three gunshots were heard, and as they emerged from the woodland on the water's edge, they saw smoke in spiral columns above an islet in the flood. A fancifully designed wooden bridge lay before them, and Lovisillo rushed upon it, clattering over the hollow planks. Ruy followed gladly, for the passage of the forest had been disagreeable, his clothes, unintended for this experience, being shredded; his wide-brimmed hat was struck off and impaled on a branch. A pretty picture to set before a king, and win him.

Once upon the islet, it was evident that it was the arena of the conflict. Two dead wolves were the pillow of a wild sow which, dying, had whistled for its young, and was striving to roll over on its side. Three or four others were scrambling in the thicket, where was a prodigious agitation, men swearing and invoking the saints, twigs snapping, horses rearing, and wild animals snarling. It forced Ruy to believe that, repulsed by the water, the game had turned on the pursuers. All seemed involved in a desperate struggle.

He was afforded no chance to interfere. No doubt, hearing him come, a grey wolf darted up so close to his horse's hoofs as to make it leap up like a deer; shot between him and the dwarf, whose young pony wheeled and took to flight as if in company with it, and was out of sight like a flash of lightning.

Immediately, with an encouraging shout, a number of riders, in the royal uniform, waving hunting-swords, precipitated themselves like a torrent on the track of the wolf. If Ruy had not held his horse firmly it would have been swept away in the mad column.

While he was restraining it, there appeared the prickers on foot, nobles dismounted by accident, and the servants, and they pressed on in the way broadened and smoothed by the troop. Some gave the stranger a glance in passing, but the hunting fever was too engrossing for any to halt, and he was, for the nonce, left alone.

Meanwhile, the squealing of the young pigs had continued, and the highest pitched pipes of an organ could not have outdone them in piercingness and volume. They were still struggling to arrive at their dam, stiffening after the death agony, when a prolonged crashing in the willows, and a terrible snorting, warned Ruy that their appeals had been heard by their sire. In another instant, the head of an old boar, all the more ferocious as it had broken one of its huge tusks in its headlong charge, rose in the edge of the little clearing made by the horsemen, and the small, fiery eyes glared at the stupefied spectator.

His horse would not stand the onset of this hideous brute. It sought now to turn and flee; and he hastened, convinced of the inability to restrain it with one hand alone, to throw himself off. Leaving it to run away, he drew his sword, wrapped his mantle around his useless arm after the old Spanish manner to convert a mantle into a shield, and awaited the boar.

But it had ceased to struggle forward. It had passed all the objects before its cruel eyes in review, and perceived the dead pig and the little ones, as well as Ruy on guard. But at that instant it heard, before he did, the approach of another enemy, and lowered its head for the ripping stroke for his benefit.

A splendid white Arab, which Ruy had seen twice before that day, shone ghost-like beyond the boar, and, trained in these encounters, executed

a tremendous bound, which cleared the ugly antagonist. Unfortunately for the rider, the bound was not expected, and it partly unseated him. Letting a long, silver-barrelled pistol fall, he clapped both hands, long and fine, to the high pummel of the Moorish saddle, imposing such a weight on that point that the girdle broke, and he was hurled over the arched neck upon the trampled sward not two yards from Ruy.

The liberated barb, sending one of the little pigs flying with an angry kick, sprang away, as the boar, roaring and scattering foam, left the undergrowth like a bale of bristles bowled at the fallen man by a playful giant.

It was the King.

In the thousandth part of a second, Ruy put the question to himself and answered it—

Should he let the husband live of the woman he loved—an imbecile, worthless, long given over by the physicians?

There was no appeal from the one in danger—too proud or too stunned to crave assistance. Ruy shunned the feelingless gaze of the cold blue eye, for already he reproached himself for his incalculable hesitation. He took his leap to meet the boar in its own impulsion, and as the matador kills the bull, he slew it with a spear-like thrust of the sword in the distended neck. At the same time he gave the dextrous turn of the wrist which would cause the dying beast to fall to the right of himself and also, but less clear, of the King, and it did fall clear of both.

Instinctively the latter drew up his long and loose-jointed legs, but it was the last impulse of the senses. From deadly pale he turned white, as if every drop of blood had ceased to circulate in his wasted frame; his eyes seemed those of a dead fish, his very aquiline nose drew down, peaked as if to meet the pointed and jutting chin, so that between them the bulbous Austrian lip would be pinched; and the narrow face became incredibly lengthened.

Ruy believed that the unfortunate Sovereign was dying between the shock and the fright, but, just as he was going to lay hands on him at the risk of committing a species of high treason in touching the Lord's anointed, Don Carlos groaned deeply and, suddenly flushing, was agitated from top to toe by an alarming fit; he ground his teeth and foamed almost as badly as the boar, so that his large mouth disclosing imperfect, yellowed teeth, broken and thrown out of shape in previous crises of his complaint, grinned horribly.

The observer's pity overcame his disgust, and again he stooped to lift up the writhing body, when the dwarf rode on his pony into the place. He was the forerunner of nobles and body-servants, who, divining what had happened, and knowing what to do, dismounted and took the Monarch under their care. While his hands were opened out and beaten, and some drops of a cordial forced between his set teeth, Ruy introduced himself to the Master of the Hunt, who was the Duke of Pastrana, and related the part he had fortunately been enabled to play. As the blood on his hand and the disablement of his arm were naturally attributed to this encounter, that part was considered a great one, and the Duke was evidently delighted at the way in which his *protégé* had presented himself.

Charles no more, the succession would fall to an alien, and these nobles of Spain shrank from that contingency. So the deliverer was congratulated from all sides, and Ruy's other hand was nearly lamed by shakes.

Strange to say, he felt more gratification at heart for having relieved the dwarf from a ridiculous position than the King from death. As if there could be any comparison possible between a human puppet and the Sovereign of Spain and of both the Indies!

"Count," said the Duke, having waited to hear from the surgeon that his master would recover, and had not been wounded, "your fortune is made!"

Whereupon Lovisillo, who had laughed with sincere joy on hearing the King's voice asking after him, pushed his pony up beside Ruy, whose ear the elevation permitted him to reach, and added, in a faint whisper—

"Yes, for I will make your fortune."

CHAPTER X.

THE TYRANNY OF ETIQUETTE.

In the sitting room known as the *Lilaz* (*de Persia*), because decorated with painted sprays of jasmine on walls and ceiling, adjoining the sleeping apartments of "the Queen" —as the death of the Queen-mother had entitled the Princess Palatine to be uniquely called—she and her attendants were passing the heavy hours of the afternoon following the siesta. The large windows were fully opened and admitted the dulled sounds from the town, that was awakening for the evening work, the plash of garden fountains, and the perfumed air off the flower-beds. The sunbeams shone on the silver tables and gilt chairs, and one, reflected from a Venetian mirror, audaciously invaded the bed-chamber by a half open door and a lobby and glittered on the brocade and lace of a green damask coverlet on the bed, a ponderous structure resembling a catafalque.

This glare diminished to the eye the mellow flame in a golden lamp burning at the foot of a Virgin, painted and bedizened in a taste as profuse of ornament as the Byzantine, which confronted a figure of a saint, moulded in plaster, on the wall in which it was heavily framed in ormolu; in Gothic letters it was inscribed, "*Santa Maria Esclava*," which might be read by the wit as too blunt a slur on the place Maria Anna occupied in the land of her adoption. As if he were also a saint, a full-length portrait of Charles II., idealised after the manner of Court portrait painters, but melancholic in expression and tone of colouring, stood between the windows, the twilight detaching the figure from the background and suggesting strongly that it was—not alive, but a floating phantom. At the foot was a pedestal, sustaining the carved silver clock presented by the Town of Neuburg to the bride when she quitted that refuge of her family during the Wars. It had chimes and a host of automata which performed at the hour's striking, but the key was mislaid; it had run down, and the Spanish horologists refused to repair the foreigner's masterpiece with a pride which shielded their incapacity.

The maids of honour and the duennas, under their chief, sat at a long table embroidering; they bore the most illustrious of names and were beautiful, but under the eyes of the Camerera Mayor they were silent and lacked lustre, like those brilliant insects which have the power to become dull at the approach of danger; the Mistress of the Bed-chamber, attired in black, seemed a huge beetle among pretty moths.

This was the Duchess of Torranueva, widow of the Duke of Monteleone, who had been posted as sentry over the second wife by the Queen-mother. She had a bond of sympathy with her, if the rumour were well founded, that she also was acquainted with the powers of Locusta. Her cousin, Don Carlos of Arragon, had died suddenly while asserting a claim to Torranueva. She was three score, emaciated, tall, sallow and badly wrinkled, so that the paste for the complexion could not smooth

out the grooves. Her black eyes were small, but keen; her voice weak, yet sharp. Austere as the Queen's Capuchin confessor himself, she was as imperious as an Austrian archduchess. She was imbued with the very spirit of Spanish Court etiquette, absolutely ignored feelings, and regulated every movement according to the code, and with the most rigid formality. With piercing inquisitiveness, she let no incidents, not a fleeting smile or lifting of the brow escape her, and her shrewd judgment seemed faultless. She had worried "the French Queen" into the grave, the freedom of foreign courts being a crime in her unrelenting eyes; and held the doctrine (though Louise's successor was of a race esteemed more serene and frigid) that women are only virtuous because of want of opportunity to sin.

When her mistress was lauded for her purity, she would ask: "Who were those two men seen at Dusseldorf when she was travelling hither and was the affianced of our lord, hiding behind the tapestry in her Majesty's own room? Tell me that!"

From the outset the Queen had crossed swords with her, and, thanks to the King, kind from remorse, or at least grief at the loss of his previous consort, she had carried her point, and the Duchess had been compelled to yield to some modifications of her iron rules, which intensified her hatred. She acted not only as if she were guarding a personal enemy, but as if the enmity of the Queen-mother had been transmitted to her, and, like transfused virus in some bodies, had become strengthened.

In the deep doorway, erect and motionless as a panoply of empty armour, was the captain of the Queen's Lifeguards, the old Count of Oñate, the majordomo who had gone to Germany to bring the Queen to Spain. Before that time he had dressed with the negligence and penury of a soldier monk; but he had no sooner been installed guardian of the young wife than he bloomed out with an exaggerated elegance which made him, in secret, the palace laughing-stock. Ribbons decked him from the shoulder to the shoes, and his swordknot was a slice from a rainbow.

Lastly, like a pearl set in lava, steel, and jet, with a few bright stones interspersed, Maria Anna of Neuburg occupied a corner, with only the Indian girl Casilda at her feet. She was clothed in white satin, trimmed with silver, and appeared a pure and luminous creation of some master artist, until she moved or spoke, and then the grace and the music testified to the work of Nature.

The bloom and radiance of youth still played about her pale, golden hair, growing in great profusion, and without the coarseness of the black tresses of the Andalusian beauties near her. Her brows were arched over large, lively blue eyes; but the expression was of mildness. The lips were, perhaps, a trifle thick, but even a queen is not perfect. Leaning one arm on the open pages of a large book, her elbow made dog's ears of the leaves in her absence of mind. Dreary reading! it was "The Anti-Koran," — as if the German were to be defended from the misleading dogmas of Mahomet. Of such a composition was the library furnished her out of which to learn religion and Spanish! Not one book in any other language, surely none in German was allowed her.

This resolution to crush out her inborn and acquired sentiments was too strong to be met successfully; she had given way at once on that point, and let her old attendants be

sent back to Bavaria without permitting her tears to be witnessed in public. But that was excusable to one who was bound to adopt her husband's country. Not so the petty irritations of an obsolete etiquette, and she contended with them in fresh vigour daily, and carried her points more often than she lost them.

After the great victory over the Marquis of Finlas, she would have been comparatively happy, however unfortunate as a wife, a woman, and a queen, but for the fear that she had won a skirmish and not a battle.

He had been a weight upon her from the first arrival, and she had no doubt that he hated her. In him she saw concentrated all the traits which offended her in Spain, except fanaticism for religion in which he was deficient. She came to regard him as her evil genius, and heard with awe that, when she was a little child, the young Secretary had written her name foremost on the list of eligible princesses for his master's hand. It was against his voice that the choice had fallen upon Louise of France, and who knows but that, with the growing ardour of statesmen to verify their judgment and substantiate their forecasts, he had, indeed, tilted the phial of poison which too often flavours the last draught of a Queen of Spain!

She shuddered with the nearest approach to rage possible in her gentle heart, at the thought that she might be owing her crown—her unhappiness—to this saturnine Don Sallusto. On the eve of his banishment, he had come, the same as if nothing contrary had occurred, to the ceremony of kissing the royal hand. She had hoped that he was already afar, and was sadly and tranquilly giving her hand to the grandees and those they presented, as they marched up to the throne, in the Hall of Ambassadors, in single file, when she perceived her dreaded enemy approaching, with a measured step. As soon as she saw him, nothing more was visible within her view. He fastened a fiery and dazzling eye upon hers, and playing with a stiletto of which he gave glimpses of the steel by partially drawing the blade, he suddenly made his bow, supple and low, as the sweep of the serpent in striking, and she felt on her hand a cold kiss, utterly unlike that of the others.

It was the last time she saw him, for on the day when the Marquis of Santa Cruz and the Bazans placed the false Don Cæsar in their midst to be noticed, his cousin left palace and town.

But she very often thought of him in spite of numerous annoyances, and in her dreams he haunted her like an incubus. As if his glacial kiss had inoculated her with a black poison, she felt something thrill from vein to vein in long shuddering gushes into the heart, where it curdled the blood and froze it. In vain she struggled against the belief that he would return, though a disgraced minister is rarely resuscitated—the phantom menaced her, and was more appalling than the other to whom she was bound by the marriage contract.

The unruffled silence had fostered her reverie, and still no one would have dared to break it, not even the Indian girl. She tore herself from it with an effort, and, heaving a sigh, turned her eyes in every direction for some object that would dispel her troublesome thoughts.

The maids were busy, their mistress sinister, and the supplicatory mien of the Count of Oñate was not amusing, for she remembered that, in younger days, he was a senator of worth and a warrior of eminence. On the table nearest to her was a box of calambac wood,

odoriferous and exquisitely carved by a semi-savage hand whom Nature had inspired with art. She had the key in the satchel at her girdle, and drew it out to give to Casilda, who rose at her feet on seeing that she had left her spell of abstraction. The quiet sat painfully on this daughter of the sun, who was abnormally active as night drew near.

"Open the box," said the Queen; "I have had it filled with blessed relics, which I am going to send to Neuburg to my father, as soon as I find a trusty messenger. He will be so pleased. Did you not give alms to those mendicants on the square who dared not approach the palace?"

"Yes, a page threw a purse to them. They did not believe the boon was intended for them, like a dog to which stones and not bones are always cast; but when they were reassured, what a scramble!"

"It is cooler now," observed the Queen; "I will go out for an airing."

At this speech, delivered imperiously, even violently, and as if in protest to lessons imperfectly learnt, the ladies glanced apprehensively at one another with hanging heads, and the Camerera Mayor, who had heretofore remained immobile on her high backed chair, raised her creased brow from her needlework, slowly straightened herself like a jointed doll drawn out, and made a profound reverence.

"Please your Excellent Grace," she answered, in a curt, harsh voice, "the Queen cannot go out of doors, unless every door is opened, according to regulations, by one of those grandees who are Knights of the Key. It grieves me to say that none of the *Claveiros* can be in the palace at this hour, since they are all in attendance on his Majesty the King."

"The King," repeated Donna Maria Anna, "who is hunting! He is always absent," she added.

In fact, in six months she had not seen him twelve times.

"Do you mean to say that I am shut up here—locked in?" cried she, with animation. "Methinks there is an intention to stifle me with want of fresh air, Duchess!"

"I am the Chief Lady of the Chamber to your Majesty," rejoined the automaton, with another curtsy as low, and stiff as before, "and I must fulfil my duty to the least iota," and she resumed her seat as if the movement for which she had been wound up were accomplished.

In desperation, the Queen pressed her forehead in her hand and walked up and down the room a little while, murmuring—

"Must I fall to moping again? Nay, nay! I shall go mad! Ladies, quick, here!" she exclaimed; "clear the table for a game of lansquenet, and let us play!"

But the Duchess held up her yellow hands to repress the maids, who had begun to move and throw down the needle, and bade them not stir. She rose, and, making a courtsy to the Queen, observed—

"According to the ancient law, the Majesty of Spain can play cards only with crowned heads or princes and princesses of the blood."

"Then, call me in the King's relatives."

The old lady made the sign of the cross. Her horror was great at this supposed sneer at the childless and parentless Monarch, who was alone in the Court and the world.

If cards could not be put upon the table, at any rate dainties might grace it. The pleasures of the palate have often before now been the solace of royal recluses. The Queen ordered a repast to be brought, and prepared to sit at it with Casilda, whom she invited, the more to spite

the principal duenna and the ladies in attendance. The spoil-feast could not countermand the directions to the steward but when the refreshments were laid before the expectant one, enjoying too prematurely her discomfiture of the old woman, the latter intervened with the exasperating reverence and quoted the paragraph from her book of the palace etiquette :—

"When the King is not present, the Queen shall eat alone."

What was the harassed woman to do? Unable to eat, play, or go out at her own wish! In the core of this insipid Court all her days dragged on in such gilded fetters, and she almost doubted that she, only a few years since, had played like a peasant's child in the meadows and eaten berries of her own gathering, with cream from the petty farmer's dairy, brought in a wooden bowl.

On the other hand, she might, in the King's absence, play at governing the realm. That was a distraction at which she had lost some time when it was a novelty. But she had soon tired of sitting with eight or a dozen old, greedy and callous visages before her who prated of France and her profligate ruler, of Rome and the luxurious cardinals, of the viceroys whom they wished to displace—Medina for filling Naples with protests against his amorous follies, Vaudemont who was selling Milan, and Legañez, who allowed Flanders to slip from him. Anything were less unendurable than a Council of State presided over by a Queen-Regent.

The venerable Court depressed her; none of those around her appeared to have preserved even a sentiment of youth. The young lords were absent in the colonies, or at the wars; there were grey knights, and no squires; the pages, like the royal dwarfs, were premature old men, and, when not on duty, kept in trios like monkish students, or read pious tracts, instead of fencing, dicing, or even catching the ball. She feared that she, too, would be aged by seeing nothing but parchment faces and whitened beards.

Repulsed at every outlet, she sat at the table and absently tasted the sweetmeats, the choice biscuits of Burgos, and the fine cheese of Majorca. Casilda poured out the wine.

"Poor child!" sighed she, as she drank without knowing if it were Maxovella or water, "you will lose the power of enjoying life here as one may the desire to sleep. Shall we go out into the garden, spite of all? I have found one corner there where I have the right to go——"

"Alone. Pretty privilege to doze in that nook," said the Indian, in her low, melodious voice, which softened her bitter sneers. "They have put a dozen courses more of stone upon the walls, already higher than the trees, because a robber skipped over it to make love to one of those sour-faced duennas, I suppose! Oh, that he had, in the dark, mistaken the malignant Duchess for Señorita Catarina of Haro, and whipped her off under his arm! Faith! at the light on the bridge he must have dropped her into the river, and so—let pass the justice of offended mankind!"

"Casilda!"

"They have set man-traps behind every statue, too!"

"Where else can one go?"

"Ah! that's tellings. But I have learnt something more about Madrid than the language," went on the Mexican. "I have the master password, not only for the palace-warders, but the cut-throats of Matalobos. Spite of these marplots, mighty mistress, I could take you out of this gloomy hole at night—for Señorita the Donna Iñez d'Iviza will even lie

in your bed in your stead, all rules to the contrary notwithstanding—and all about the town. You have no idea how lovely it is by moonlight, when the watchmen and all good people are sleeping, and the bandit and his drab carouse over a stolen bottle in the deserted alleys. Oh, the black and red of Madrid—when the town is steeped in peaceful shadow, and the moon, like the eye of the one-eyed giant you tell me of, who was a blacksmith, rises red and round between two lids of cloud on the brow of the sky!"

"Peace!"

"Oh! let us go; it is so easy!"

"Silence! Iñez, a kinswoman of the Marquis of Finlas, and placed among my maids at his instance! No! never speak of this again!"

The excitement of Casilda slowly passed away, and all was silence throughout the vast apartment, except for the click of the needle, the swish of the thread drawn through the canvas, and the clink of the Count's sword as he changed from one foot to the other at regular intervals.

Through the open window from over the high wall and the garden full of traps came a song from the washerwomen who had delivered the clean clothes throughout the fashionable part of the town, and were returning home with their empty baskets. Theirs was one of the best trades. When the Court is corrupt, the rage for ruffles and clean shirt-fronts is great. They sang loudly and with unqualified glee. It was the same song that Ruy Blas had turned a deaf ear to on the dusty wayside. On her wheel of torment, quite reversely, the Queen drank the words of love in gladly, as long as they could be distinguished.

These work-girls were enviable, for they could sing of love, and somehow the sweet young voices made her both sadder and less miserable at the same time. Music can give a duplex sensation.

The Duchess saw her face show signs of interest, calmness and pleasure; but she hastened to interpret them in her own way. Before the last strains became faint, she rose and cried to the duennas—

"Send those women far away, for disturbing her Majesty!"

"Stay! What's that?" interrupted the Queen. "Why, one can hardly hear them now. Poor women, let them go their way in peace! I would even hear them to the last——"

But between her and the window, towards which she was hastening with Casilda, the black pawn with the mission to check the Queen, rose, and with the obeisance which she never once omitted, said—

"Your Majesty, a Queen of Spain never looks out of the window."

"By the Three Kings! as my father would say, now, this—well, well," the Queen corrected her original thought—"meseems I have bidden the world *adieu!* I should say 'Adios!' I may not so much as look upon the freedom of others—the beautiful setting sun that fills the vales, the evening's gold dust floating over the road and coating the drowsy muleteer, so that he lolls on his paniers like the ancestor of our Casilda, the Inca whom your conquering forefathers saw gilded on his throne. These and the merry lays to which the lowliest ear may listen, no more exist for me! Swing to the blinds and let the curtain drop—I am to be the embalmed Zenobia, in her sepulchral pyramid."

While the Duchess looked at her confusedly, almost about to take the expression literally, and have the curtains drawn, a hundred bells all

over the town began to boom, and a multitude of smaller ones tinkled everywhere, as well in as without the palace, where chapels abounded. It was the day of the Holy Apostles.

All the women rose, and the Duchess, driving them before her like a witch huddling her familiar spirits into a flock, enforced the withdrawal of Casilda with an imperative gesture.

"The Queen must be left to her devotions," said she, touching the arm of the Count of Oñate, who looked in the direction of the Queen in vain for a glance, and all departed with deep salutations, and in the silence of mourners.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE WILL OUT.

Queen Maria Anna felt no relief lately when left alone. Like the traveller in a dense forest, who fears that at any moment the envenomed lance of the skulking and unseen savage may be hurled at him, she had grown out of the horror of being haunted by her phantom husband, only to shrink from the Cupid, hovering over her with the fatal shaft laid on the bow in his rosy hands. Some day it would pierce her: she was not sure that it had not done so already.

Almost resigned, she had suddenly become restless and unable to sleep. Afraid of the future and detesting this present gloom, she would have exchanged the blessed bells of her capital for the cracked one that hung at the cow's neck on the meadows where she and her sister had strolled, and the cowherd, undaunted by their title, had spoken to them. That day was memorable, for a nobleman from her father's came running to say—"You will be the Queen of Spain!" Her sister congratulated her and her father was full of joy. Her mother alone wept.

"They would both weep now if they guessed how unhappy I am," murmured the Queen—poor wanderer over an obscure road without a beacon or guide!

Throughout the palace a murmur of voices sounded, as in a hive of bees, mingled with the notes of the bassoon and the tinkling of the mass bell. All were at prayers, and the wishes arose to the god of each—of war, love, cupidity, and of thievery.

To what idol would she pray?

To the unknown, who had, day after day, risked his life to give a flower to the disconsolate Queen of Spain?

Where was he now? had he been fatally wounded when he left the impress of the bleeding hand on the wall yonder?

"God forbid!" she murmured. "Yet it was his own fault. Why should he venture so much to bring me the flowers forbidden me—such trifles! One drop of that devoted blood was worth all the tears I have shed."

Every time that she went to that bench to seek the forget-me-nots, she was used to say that she would never go again. The last time, she spied a fragment of a lace ruffle dangling from a spike in the wall, and overlooked by the archers of the guard. She had taken it down and treasured it.

So there was in this gloomy land, where all were untrustworthy, malicious and cold-hearted, one who, seeing that the stranger was alone, far from all who loved her and were dear, endeavoured to cheer her and to gratify a wish, without asking reward and, perhaps, without hoping for any.

"Be you who you may," she ejaculated, as she carried her hand to her beating heart, "you are a true friend! may my blessing be always yours and your sweetheart's love never fail you!"

One such friend pitted against an implacable enemy like Don Sallusto! If one, possibly, loved her, the other surely hated. Could the

guardian angel save her from the demon?

"Alas, I know not," she sighed. "My fate dances on the unfathomable sea between contrary gales! How feeble is a queen: how small a thing!"

She went and knelt on the praying stand before the Virgin, but it was vainly that she tried to pray: she could not even raise her eyes to the enamelled orbs bent downwards.

She drew from her bosom the scrap of lace, wound round a withered bunch of the forget-me-nots and a letter many times opened and folded. The lace was stained red. She laid them on the table as if, upon her heart, they had made her thoughts unholy, and tried again to pray.

"I never again wish to look at it!" she cried. "Oh, Virgin, star of the sea! Oh, Virgin, hope of the martyr! come to my aid! Queen of meekness, hasten to my appeal!"

But she rose unappeased, and going over to the table as if the keepsakes exercised irresistible fascination, she grasped the letter and said—

"Yet will I read you once again, for the last, last time! Then I shall tear you up—I shall burn you!"

Over her animated features a mocking smile ran; she had repeated this threat during the month. Unrolling the note which her nervous fingers had converted into a cylinder, she read, as if the few words were not learnt by heart—

"LADY,—In the shadow under your foot is a man who loves you, and suffers beneath the veil of night. For you he will give his very soul, if needs be, and will die here in order that you shall shine on high."

"Yes, it is not so much a friend as a lover," she thought, carefully folding up letter, flowers and lace into a packet which she replaced in the single receptacle where she might intrust a secret.

In the adjoining realms a Keeper of the Seals had been found bold enough to offer to tear a love-letter from Anna of Austria; but not in all Spain, even against a foreigner, was there one person who would threaten the Queen's person: chivalry shielded her, stronger than the dread of axe and rack. Yet she trembled at carrying about with her the petty engine—a sheet of paper—that could destroy her in a moment.

"It is deadly; but when the soul is athirst it will have drink, even though nothing but poison is offered."

On all the earth there was nobody to care for her, and yet she was a woman whom everything had prepared for the master passion. She would have loved the King if that had been possible, but he had no more than politely responded to her cordial words and sympathetic conversation. He simply left her alone. But yet her still constant devotedness might affect him. He would not always be fond of sports of the wood. He was of low intelligence, but he had been kept in ignorance by state policy; already she had found him accessible to kind words. He was temperate, a little by orders of the physician—and never vicious. He had supported her in her objections to thorns in the Court etiquette, and he had let her blunt the points, if not remove them. If only she could change his increasing worship of his dead wife into adoration of the second one, all might be well for him and herself.

It was with joy, as if her unformed prayer was answered, that her meditation was broken into by the usher's announcement that a message had arrived from the King at the hunting-grounds.

"From the King?" she repeated, with a relieved and bounding heart. "I am saved!"

The Duchess of Torranueva soon

followed the usher, having collected her duennas and the ladies to do honour to the rare favour of a message from the King: they and pages lined the room. The Count of Oñate pointed out to two pages, who carried the missive in question on a gold fringed velvet cushion, how they were to precede the actual messenger. This was a young nobleman, magnificently dressed, but his laced mantle fell over his left arm and concealed it. He modestly let the pages attract all the Queen's impatient attention. They knelt, and the Duchess, taking up the note as the usage prescribed, slowly cut the silk and broke the royal seal as if she feared that a viper would leap out. Then, still more slowly, she read it to herself, and let a blissful smile doubly wrinkle her furrowed cheeks.

"Read it! Aloud! Come, read it to us," cried the Queen, stamping her foot.

This was the letter which the Sovereign who had nearly lost his life, wrote to the young wife who longed for one loving word—

"SENORA,—Though the wind was high, I killed six wolves.—CARLOS."

The Queen frowned incredulously, and sighed; while Don Guritan, feeling a little of her disappointment, hastened to inquire—

"Is that all?"

It was all. No gratitude to his deliverer—no haste to reassure the partner of his life. To a jealous, tender, yearning, listless heart, the news of the weather and a line from the book of the Master of the Wolfhounds. Alas!

The Queen repulsed the letter which was held out to her by the old Camerera.

"All!" echoed the latter, reproachfully, to the Count. "What more would ye have? Our King is out a-hunting. He honours us with the state of the weather, and lets us felicitate him on his prowess in the chase. I call it very fine! A letter in his august hand—nay—it is not written—it was dictated."

The Queen almost snatched the letter from her as she lowered her head till her nose all but touched it, and she scanned it hastily. Indeed, it was not an autograph, except the signature, straggling and weak, in strong opposition to the firm, bold and graceful lines. Struck with consternation, as a new idea flashed on her, and examining each letter with greater attention, she almost let it fall in the dread discovery that it was the same as that of the declaration of loving allegiance worn on her heart. The same, or a gross illusion!

For the first time, she looked beyond the message to the messenger. The pages had backed from the presence with their hassock, and but for the Duchess and Oñate, who intercepted her glances, she might have seen the envoy.

"Where is the bearer?" she questioned.

"A young gentleman whom his Majesty has lately honoured by appointing squire to your Grace. The Duke of Pastrana recommends him to me in particular as a kinsman of my Lord of Santa Cruz."

"What is the name?"

"It is Lord Don Cæsar of Bazan, Count of Garofa. If I am to believe the letter of credit to myself, he is the most accomplished of young gentlemen."

"It is well. I would speak to him."

"If it be to recompense him as messenger, the custom is——"

"Do not hamper me with your 'customs' when the King delights me with his remembrance! Señor!"

The youth in the mantle ap-

proached, pale and perturbed, with a slow step, past Don Guritan, who inspected him closely, but concluded that so young a squire could not be a cause of irritation to him, even in his unbounded jealousy.

The change of dress and the ennoblement prevented the Queen's recollections coming forward clearly, for she did not recognize Ruy, though she had not forgotten the Spaniard who had consoled her with his greeting under the porch of the mansion of Oñate, or the central figure in the family group of the Bazans, when the Marquis of Finlas was exiled. As one speaks in a dream, she began formally to question—

"So, you come from Aranjuez?"

He bowed.

"The King is well?" Again he dared not trust his tongue. "He dictated this for me?" showing the letter.

"He was in the saddle at the time and dictated it to—to one of the bystanders," he concluded, after a transient hesitation.

He had looked up at last and caught her eyes. His seemed to penetrate her soul, and she dared scarcely ask particulars. Why was she so deeply stirred?

"Many of the Court would be around my Lord?"

"Truly, yes."

"Who wrote this?"

"I do not know the names yet of anybody at the Court," said Ruy; "I have not been among them long enough; for it is only three days ago that I quitted Madrid."

Her glance was full of perplexity at the answer. Three days! and during three days there had been no more forget-me-nots. She coloured up, while he turned very pale and tottered, so that he had to catch hold of the back of the chief duenna's chair.

"Señora, the gentleman is not well," whispered Casilda.

But, while protesting that it was nothing—the ride, the sun, the mountain wind—Ruy suddenly lost consciousness, and, sinking upon the chair, swooned away. His cloak opened out of itself, and disclosed his left arm enveloped in reddened bandages.

"He is hurt in the hand," cried the Mexican girl, detained by no etiquette in her anomalous position and by no awe of the Duchess from running to his side.

"Wounded!" said the Queen to herself, goaded by a terrible surmise.

In an instant all was commotion where heretofore the strictest order and quiet had reigned. The younger ladies fluttered around the handsome youth, and brought phials of essences for him to inhale; a page offered the feather out of his cap as, literally, a burnt sacrifice; and the Count of Oñate himself, with that knowledge of surgery picked up on the battlefield and the creed of Dr. Sangrado, hastened to draw a poniard and undertake to bleed him in order to cure the syncope from waste of blood. Had not the Queen prohibited that operation, the chances of Ruy's return to life must have been reduced to a feeble one.

Once only, and just for a second, Ruy opened his eyes. It was at the same moment that the Queen perceived with the utmost fright that, in her agitation, she had let the little packet work up almost so as to fall. Ruy perceived the blood-dyed lace around his note and the posy; and she, warned by his eloquent glance, and thrusting it back, identified that lace with the ruffle on his uninjured hand, hanging limply by the chair side.

"It is on her heart," he thought, as, spite of himself, his eyes closed again.

"It is he!" she murmured, receding out of the group offering advice and succour.

The Count of Oñate alone stood outside the circle, like her, and he might have noticed the incident. But he did not look at her, turning his gaze intently on the King's messenger, like the others.

"But how was he wounded?" cried Casilda; "was he attacked by the robbers?"

"No," replied a treble voice at the level of the knee of Don Guritan, as Lovisillo insinuated himself through the circle into the clear centre, where the insensible man awaited his fate between the royal smelling salts and the Count's dagger. "But he charged a wild boar that overthrew the King, and he saved his life, I fear only at the price of his own. Then he has been galloping all the way from Aranjuez, and he left me far behind on my Azrael."

"The King in danger! Oh, that is why he did not write!" cried Maria Anna.

"Not at all, your Majesty. He had one of his fits, but he never was better in his life than when I left him," continued the dwarf. "But, look, my ladies, the young Count is coming to!"

"And the Queen is going off," said Casilda.

"Clear the room!" thundered the Count of Oñate, as the Queen sank into the arms of the Mexican; and Ruy was carried out by the pages.

He could walk, but he had hardly more consciousness than to know what a narrow screen separated him and the Queen from the discovery of their mutual secret. He had divined that his letter had reached its address, and he had won the place from which the King, by *his* letter, had eternally deposed himself.

"Oh, that I were dead!" he wished, unlike a happy lover. "Oh, the shame of it, to love in a mask!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE THANKLESS DEFENCE.

The Queen's indisposition was but passing, but the Duchess of Torranueva said loudly that such sympathy with the King—fuller news of the wolf hunt and his seizure arriving during the night—did her infinite credit. A compliment from Diogenes could not have more startled the maids of honour. As for Ruy, the loss of blood had only tamed his fever. On the afternoon of the succeeding day, he went into the rooms of the Count of Oñate and placed himself at his orders as squire of the Queen, by direct royal appointment.

There was no contesting this, since Lovisillo and later couriers confirmed more than Ruy had advanced; and Don Guritan, experienced in Court circles, acknowledged that the new star was worthy of the system, and might be greater than a satellite at an early day. His jealousy was aroused, and while explaining the routine of services he observed the recruit narrowly.

"You are her Majesty's squire now," he concluded. "As for your service this night, since you are so eager to commence, it is simple and easy. You will go on duty in the ante-chamber for the night-guard, and let nobody pass excepting his Majesty. He is absent at the moment, but he is given to returning at any time unheralded."

"I thank your lordship, and——"

"Stay. So far I have acquitted myself as captain and the senior of the Court functionaries especially set to watch over the Queen. Now, to a private matter. I am one of those who do not let matters grow unto a head and then find the subjugation a task for Hercules. I nip it in the bud. Let me see—your sword is of the latest fashion, not so long as my old Bilboa. It is well. I will bring two rapiers of equal length to the ground to-morrow."

"My lord, what does this mean?" cried Ruy, for the old noble had measured with his eye the sword he was wearing and his own.

"In the year '50," responded he, with perfect gravity, "I was living at Alicante, and I was a hothead. A youngster of the high name of Vasquez, though not of lawful birth, would persist in promenading under the balcony of my lady love, who lived near the cathedral, and in pride no captain on the admiral's flagship could compare with him. I called him out, and I ran him through the heart. Wait a moment!

"A little later, in '66, the Count of Iscola, a *caballero* of prime quality, presumed to send my Angelica a sweet epistle by a slave. I had the slave flogged, and I cut the master down like an oak, with the *coup de Jarnac*."

"My lord!"

"Again, in '80, I believe my beauty let herself be decoyed away by the tender suing of Thirso Gamonal, one of those fine striplings whose high yet winsome countenance goes well with a bright-tinted plume. It was the time when it was the fashion to have mules shod in gold.

We fought with dagger and long-sword in the style of the mignons of Henry of Poland, and, 'faith! Thirso's gold-shod mule carried a dead master home."

"In short, my lord, what does this catalogue of hotheads, mules, gallants, and easy virtue have to do with an esquire-novice of the Queen?" questioned Ruy, pertly.

"It means that when a man draws water from a well, he must be made to drink it! that the sun rises to-morrow morning at four of the clock, and that there is a place, deserted, and out of the trodden roads, pretty commodious to brave men, behind the chapel. You are the Count of Garofa, grandson of Don Juan, the great admiral, and I, Gaspar of Oñate, once Viceroy for our King in the realm of Naples."

"It is well, my lord," returned Ruy, coolly, though he feared that the challenge portended even a more dangerous event than a duel, from the old courtier having suspected that his wound was rather owing to palace wall spike than wild boar tusk. "I shall be there, after my first night under arms. It was a legend of our fathers that the maiden-knight must cross swords with the demon to make his watch thorough."

The Count heard the last sentence with the same imperturbability.

"You are not of my time, Don Cæsar," he pursued, with the garrulity of age loth to let a subject drop until worried, however dry, to the last drop of marrow in the bone, "and if you would be pleased to know my habits and likings, for your instruction I would say that I have never cherished any but a very moderate taste for the modern conquerors, who turn up their mustachios at the point, and seldom treat their rapiers so,—effeminate carpet-knights who are now whining and now radiant, and lounge in armchairs, with adorable attitudes, and wink like a chameleon in the sun ere they faint elegantly for scratches."

"I do not follow you," began Ruy, losing his patience at last, for once the meeting was arranged, this superfluity of taunts exasperated him.

"I beg to contradict: you do. We two are running at the same mark, and one of us is one too many in the palace. You are a squire, and I the majordomo, but the guards are all gentlemen, and off duty, equals through all their grades. Sooth to say, the game is not even, for I am cast the lot of the senior, and you the junior's; and so you alarm me. When I sit to table and find across the boards, with my favourite dish between, a hungry young reveller with burning eyes, and sound, sharp teeth, I am afraid. As for a struggling together on the field of love, a quicksand under the flowers, dear, my lord, I have had enough of such bouts. I have the gout, and my foot is no longer firm. Besides, I am not such a fool as to dispute for any Penelope against a younker so apt to fall in swoons. Thus it is that, acknowledging you handsome, graceful, tender, and highly interesting, I am compelled to kill you."

"Try it, my lord! I am not a lazzarone of Naples, and my fainting fits do not occur when I have steel in my hand."

"Count of Garofa, it is agreed that, at the appointed hour, and on the spot assigned, to-morrow morning, without seconds or varlets, we will lessen the Queen's Lifeguards below their number, with rapier and dagger, as becomes noblemen worthy of such houses as claim us."

"So be it," replied Ruy, taking the hand extended to him. "One word—this is not to be trumpeted throughout the town. You have spoken not a hint to anyone?"

"To no one. To-morrow!"

Ruy went forth with a steady step. All things considered, the old noble had proposed what suited the fine drawn situation. He had seen under the surface, and his death was necessary to preserve the secret which involved the Queen.

"I'll kill him like a dog to-morrow!" thought he, as he proceeded to the tailor of the guards to order a uniform, "for all his years and services."

Don Sallusto seemed to have selected his agent well. Already Ruy felt no compunction about slaying an obstacle to his love, though he shuddered to think what would be his action if the King came on the night of his watch.

So absorbed was he in his dark thoughts, that he did not perceive Casilda flitting before him up the corridor. She turned towards the Queen's apartments, saying to herself—

"It was well I listened. The old heron has ever meant mischief! He detests the young, and I have always wished for playfellows of my own age in the palace. Kill this dear young gallant in the morning! not if I can prevent it, or induce my lady to intervene."

While she was communicating to the Queen what fragments she had picked up of the grim dialogue of Don Guritan and the sham Don Cæsar, the former drew his sword, and made passes at a stand of arms. The manner in which Ruy had accepted the challenge, and the fact of his hand not trembling in the grasp, had made him reflect that he might be brave, in spite of the fainting. His exercise was interrupted by the sound of a door opening, and turning he saw, entering by the private staircase, the Queen herself! With her own hands she was carrying that box in which were confined the sacred relics intended for her father's consolation. The Elector was not a Lutheran, and Spain was a vast storehouse of the miracle-working bones of saints. In surprise and delight the startled noble nearly let fall the sword.

"I was looking for you, Count," said she, with a smile.

"For m-m-me! To what do I owe this felicity?" he inquired, in rapture, and sheathing his sword with a tremulous hand.

"A mere nothing, señor, or next to nothing," as she put the casket on a sideboard, and she added, lightly laughing, "the ladies were chattering, as you know they will chatter when the cat—the Duchess—is away, when—but you know how apt that Mexican girl is to say whatever comes into her silly head, when Casilda averred that these young guardsmen of mine were whipper-snappers, and that, for a real errand of danger and endurance, the captains were worth the entire company. She argued that you would do anything in the world for your Queen, serving me as grandly and loyally as you have the King and his father."

"The minx spoke the truth," assented the old beau, tittering. "I am obliged to the Mexican."

"But I upheld the contrary," continued the Queen, without ceasing her laughing.

"May I say that your Majesty was wrong?"

"But she talked of men laying down their lives, as they used—throwing away their souls and fortunes——"

"Casilda understands the old but undying spirit of Spanish chivalry better than these degenerate daughters of Sandoval and Leyba, your ladies in attendance. Her Castilian may be faulty, but her opinion of the old Castilian is perfect."

"Yet I say nay."

"Your Majesty, I must not dispute, but I will say that I am ready to do anything for your sake."

"Everything is such a comprehensive word," said the Queen, doubtfully.

"I would do everything!" replied Don Guritan, tapping the hilt of his sword and making the brass ferule of the scabbard ring against his heel.

"But, in that case, would you do the deed, to please me, on the instant I told it to you?"

He lifted his hand. "By my venerated patron, Saint Gasparo, I swear it! Order, and I will obey, though my death be on it!" he said, energetically, feeling all the enthusiasm of his thirtieth year under those fair eyes.

"That is well," said she, quickly, taking up the calambac casket. "Pray depart from Madrid straightway to carry this reliquary to my father, the Elector Palatine at Neuburg."

Don Guritan champed his white mustachios, for he was caught.

"To Neuburg?" he stammered. "It is six hundred leagues away!"

"Only five hundred and fifty," amended the Queen.

The box was carefully enwrapped in a cloth of silk, with azure fringe, which her ladies had worked, and she begged him not to let it be frayed or faded on the way.

"When am I to start?" he asked.

"Straightway!" with a pretty, pettish stamp of the satin slipper.

"But I could hardly make my preparation before a week—three days—well, to-morrow," he protested, in spite of the frown.

"Such a delay—I cannot consent to it!" cried the Queen.

He was in the toils.

"But, your Majesty——"

"Her Majesty says—go for her or from her, instantly!"

"Then——"

"I had your promise!"

"But a matter of business——"

"Oh, when you were going into a monastery, and had settled all your worldly matters? Impossible!"

"Yet for an object so frivolous."

"Duty to one's parents frivolous! Now, quick!"

"You will leave me a day?"

"Not one moment," she replied, sharply.

"Still——"

"Do my pleasure, or——," she playfully drew the edge of her sheathed fan across the back of his long neck above the ruff.

"Ugh," he exclaimed.

"The box or the block?"

"The box for a preference, though ——"

"Will you be off?"

"Without a farewell to my friends, without a kiss from my niece?"

"There! I will give you one as her proxy," and the madcap lightly flung her arms around his neck and left a kiss as lightly on his parchment cheek.

"I resist no longer," he stammered, between charm and vexation. "I obey."

To himself he muttered, "The good angel came down to Tobias in the likeness of a young man. The wicked one comes up in the likeness of a young woman. I never was so cajoled. But I shall have that bout with the Count before I start, somehow."

She seemed to penetrate his thoughts, for, pointing out of window, where there was the rumbling of wheels and the clattering of horseshoes on the cobblestone pavement, she explained—

"I have ordered round one of the royal coaches. You shall journey as becomes the Queen's Envoy Extraordinary. It is awaiting you below."

His last hope was gone—she had

foreseen everything! It was evident that she purposed seeing him into the conveyance, and, no doubt, the coachman, the footmen, and the escort would have orders to prevent him delaying.

He scribbled a few words of apology to Ruy, alleging his duty, and, ringing for a page, sent the excuse to "Don Cæsar of Bazan." He meant to return as quickly as possible, and then the duel would come off. He took up the casket of relics under one arm, kissed the Queen's hand, and, profoundly saluting her, stalked out of the room. She listened to him descending the stairs, and, going to the window, saw him step into the huge vehicle. A lacquey banged the door and leaped on behind beside his fellow, and away it rolled.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed, leaning on the ledge of the window, "the cruel old 'Butcher of Naples' will not kill him!"

CHAPTER XIII.

"WELL ROARED, LION!"

At the beginning of the second week in October the people of Madrid celebrated Santa Brigida's Day by an attempt at rioting on a broader scale than ever. To the cry of "Long life to the King and death to the bad rulers!" they ran about and drove the archers and the noblemen's servants under cover.

Matalobos had taken to the hills, for the town was not worth plundering, he had scornfully said. In truth, misery had increased the rancour of fettered trade and workless crafts against the better classes. Famine bores holes in the heart and loads them with hatred; one day all these human shells assemble, and the explosion is a revolution.

Absorbed in their individual grievances, men glided from one closed shop to another, and ceased to speak even of the latest marvels—the rise of a new minister. Swiftly, but steadily, Don Cæsar, Lord of Garofa, emerged from the obscurity of his eclipse. The people loved such mystery and romance as attended him. After the joyous burst of brilliancy, when he dazzled Madrid with his costly eccentricities, the untraced life in the diamond mines of Brazil, and the exploration for the abstracted treasure of the Peruvians, rolled into the abysses of the Andes, adventures ascribed to him, insufficiently filled the gap. Squire to the Queen, her household costing seven hundred thousand ducats a year, it had seemed an obscure Pactolus wherein he drew the net unsuspectedly. Enriched by this means, or its simply swelling what he brought from America, he became Secretary to the Chamber of the Indies; then Secretary to the Council of State; next Minister and Duke of Olmedo, with the Order of the Golden Fleece. All in half a year.

No trace of another attack of his spendthrift humour appeared. On the contrary, he had the morose taste to dwell in a plain house near the Tormez Mansion, under closed shutters and drawn curtains. Busybodies and spies were foiled on knocking up the servants there to question, for they were two negroes whose tongues had been excised in the Turkish fashion, to prevent them babbling.

Scandal was baffled as well as curiosity: boon companions of the Count of Garofa were fished out of prison and the galleys, and induced to write to the Duke of Olmedo. They were sent purses, but at the same time commanded to write no more and keep their distances.

The Queen was suspected of furnishing the impulsion which lifted her esquire so high, but he never saw her. They seemed to shun one another, and the sharp tongues which said that the Marquis of Finlas had been exiled for refusing to take Casilda to wife, asserted that her patroness was offended because the mushroom duke would not, also, suffer an espousal to her. It was said that she had been promised a title—a Mexican one, but the Duke of Montezuma had protested.

Even the bitterest foes acknow-

ledged that Ruy acted like one of good old stock, and wore the ducal coronet as to it born. The people and the peers agreed in believing him a paragon of honour and probity, and when the signal favour was accorded him of letting him "dine behind the curtain," the popular wit added: "At least, here is one who will not take advantage of the screen to pocket the spoons!"

The King? There was no longer a question of him. The last fit, after the fall off the horse on Aranjuez Island, had been the worst of the series. He had renounced hunting, his sole passion, and shutting himself up in the grey Escurial, beside the tomb of his first wife, lived there, beating his consumptive breast and speaking to the marble ear. As if he had formally abdicated, the Queen was expected to manage the realm, and she delegated the powers tacitly to the new Minister.

Eguya, the warming-pan of a Premier, a son of a Court servant and hence abashed before a Bazan, had been easily induced to step aside and let the Duke of Olmedo wield the pen which the three Philips had found as incapable as the sword and torch to stay the Reformation and the losses of their temporal power.

On a day named, the Queen passed swiftly in a litter through the streets, where all the saunterers were sullen, and the armed men who had quelled the tumult could not repress outcries against the foreigner, and plaudits for the new Minister, who was "a true Spaniard," they said. She arrived gladly at the palace monastery of San Lorenzo the Royal.

She had not come to join the King in praying in the Pantheon, where his father had arranged for all the royal dead to be entombed. She did not even inquire where he was.

There was a Council of State—the *Despacho universal*, in court jargon—to be held; but it was not her intention, as usual, to occupy the throne-chair at the head of the table. Ordering silence about her arrival to be preserved, she left her attendants in her private rooms, and, entering, through an unused guardroom, the secret passages constructed by order of Philip III., and which wound in and about the walls like the tunnel of a mason bee, she gained the side wall of the "Government Hall," where, by a peephole ingeniously concealed behind a large stretch of arras, depicting a siege and storming of a fortified place in Holland, she could see and hear everything that took place in the Privy Council, as the invisible master who suggested it, as well as her husband, had often done. Singular pastime, to look on, unsuspected and unprotesting, where the kingdom was parted into lots and sold, and the thieves divided their spoil.

Upon the square table fell light from a high and wide window, and it was reflected from writing paper upon as many desks as there were chairs around the cloth of green velvet. The ministers and their assistants, some in Court dress, some in their uniform of black, sat in their places or moved about the room.

The Queen knew them all, and abhorred them, as much one as another.

From the President of the Council, Don Manuel Arias, to the Supreme Indian Secretary, to her they were birds of prey. This was the royal menagerie rather than that at Aranjuez, and the waste and loss in feeding them were the greater.

A chair stood unoccupied by the side of a larger one to her right, on a daïs carpeted and beneath a canopy in cloth of gold, with the royal coat of arms; the large chair was ornamented with gold, and was for the absent yet present Queen.

She congratulated herself on her course, for the councillors were speaking about her and the new Minister.

Playing with his Collar of the Fleece, the President of Castile observed to his neighbour—

"My dear Camporeal, the Queen reigns over us, but this Don Cæsar over her! His sudden ascension covers some mystery of the alcove."

She blushed, and in her mental tablets registered a vow against Don Manuel which it would have made him turn pale to read.

Love Don Cæsar? she would only admit that she held him in "affection." So it is with the gentler sex. They repulse facts; but clothe them with deceptive words and they will accept them; still the words must be carefully selected. The bare name makes them indignant; they are frightened, yet will tolerate it if disguised in fashionable phraseology, and will smile at periphrases. It is only later—often too late—that they learn how much reality is in the "almost." Most women trip, and many fall, on the dangerous declivity of softened expression.

The Queen, therefore, regarded the sage minister as a base slanderer.

"All considered, and after having my sleuthhounds dog him for these six months," remarked another old noble, "I say he is an honest man."

They laughed incredulously.

"Oh, candid Ubilla," cried the Count of Camporeal, "to let yourself be dazzled by the tinsel of a Bazan. The cousin of our poor Sallusto honest! What say you, Priego?"

"That you are all imprudent to speak frankly in a palace! My grandfather, brought up in the favour of the great Count Duke, used to say: 'Snap at the King but fawn on the favourite!' The Duke of Olmedo is a great man! My lords, in the absence of the King, praying, the Queen, playing, and the Premier, like them all, delaying, let us go on ——."

"Betraying; and, under guise of transacting public business, concert on our private affairs," broke in Ubilla.

They took up the pens and scrawled on the paper, yawned in their sleeves, and gradually sank into silence and idleness. Soon the heads leaned towards one another in twos and threes, and whispered bargaining went on, some of the scraps reaching the listener. The secret lining of the room made it a whispering gallery to one placed where she was posted. But she lent an idle ear: there was nothing new in their conversation.

One asked another to fill out and sign a warrant for a nephew to be paid his salary as Alcade out of the Fund of the Holy Relics; a second sought a commission, with active service pay, for a son upon a vessel not yet off the stocks. In the midst of the wrangles rose one with a long white beard and patriarchal aspect.

"My lords and gentlemen, Councillors of Castile," he began, in an unctuous voice, stroking the silvery hairs free from every mote, like an ermine, "in order that none of us should stray from his own sphere, it is important that our rights should be properly regulated and our shares settled. It is a public misfortune that the revenue of Spain should be scattered in a hundred hands."

As there were only some twenty in the cabinet, this proviso was warmly applauded.

"A term must be put to it. Some have too much to do, and others too little. You, Ubilla, have the tobacco monopoly; and you, Marquis of Priego, the musk and indigo. Camporeal receives the poll-tax for eight thousand souls, and other incomes not to be despised. I see that Montazgo, my old friend, looks hard at

me with his disquieted eye; and yet it was I who contrived to procure him the tax on arsenic, in the time when they said the King was poisoned with it, and the privilege for storing snow. In short, my lords, you have everything, from rosewood to the deals for coffins of paupers—from prayer-books to playing-cards, while I, Covadenga, Secretary of the Isles, have nothing. Allow me something."

They laughed heartily as he sat down.

"Old rat that you are," said Camporeal, "when you have the clearest and the largest profits in cash, and not goods that often go slowly off in the marts! You lay tribute on all the islands in the two oceans: you lay one claw on Majorca and cling to the Peak of Teneriff with the other! What greediness, to complain!"

"Truly I have nothing to speak of," repeated Covadenga, warmly, and losing his oily tones.

"Why, you have a mint in the slave trade," retorted Priego.

Covadenga rose at the same time as he, and their clashing speeches were so fierce that the Queen feared for a moment that they would take one another by the venerable beards.

"If any one should complain," interrupted Montazgo, "is it not I? If you were to allow me the Woods, now, I might keep my head above water!"

"If you will give me the arsenic," said Covadenga to Priego, "I will cede the blacks to you!"

On went the quarrels and hotter were the words. Everybody rose and was gesticulating. Suddenly the unsuspected listener perceived that another auditor, just as unsuspected, had glided in by a secret door under the tapestry, and was regarding the verbal combat.

It was Ruy Blas.

The Queen had not seen him for some time, as they had mutually avoided one another, but she thought that he could not look better. Less hale and lofty, as if he had been pining at that loss of a sight of her, it would have pleased her better. But he was so noble, so exalted in the indignation and contempt which burned in his dark eyes, that, involuntarily and without a qualm of impiety, she thought that, spite of his black velvet suit under a scarlet mantle, the white plumed hat and the collar of the Golden Fleece, he had stepped out of the large picture at the end of the hall. It was the masterpiece of Gaspar Becerra, and represented in the style of Michel Angelo, the "Driving of the Money-Changers out of the Temple."

From his first words he was going to carry out the analogy which he had not noticed.

"A hearty appetite, my lords!" he cried, suddenly placing himself in the heart of the group.

Turning round, they were seized with surprise and uneasiness at the firm look with which he surveyed them.

"Oh! ministers of integrity," he went on, folding his arms, "virtuous councillors! Servants who pillage the house, is this your manner of playing the faithful steward? It would appear that you have no shame in choosing this gloomy hour when Spain is dying, bathed in her tears. The only act in which you are interested is to fill your pockets and scamper away! Oh, that the sides of the grave would fall in upon you, where you have crept to rob! The hand of Heaven brand you! Look! look! and feel some shame on Spanish virtues and Spanish grandeur breaking away. Hear you not the laughter of Europe, who hates you, at England and Holland dividing the realm on which the sun never sets?"

Where had he found this trumpet voice, which silenced the proud peers and thrilled the daughter of princes in her covert? The base-born orphan, in whom genius and passion had been vainly repressed by society till they sprang up all the more strongly from the harsh violence with which they had been crushed.

"Your King is but a phantom, says Rome, and so she deceives you," he pursued, with a touch of sorrow. "Piedmont you reckon as a friendly state, but you can but partially risk an army where the Duke of Savoy and his country are full of pitfalls. France and Austria both lie in wait till the favourable moment to catch you tripping. The Bavarian Infanta is dying, too, you know.

"What remedy have you for our losses of vital blood? The country is exhausted of men and money; the seas, where the wrath of the Almighty has swept three hundred sailing vessels and uncounted galleys into perdition, are defenceless. The people? We have no people now! Freedom and property make men love the land, and servitude to hate it. The Spaniard flocks abroad and takes root there, leaving grass to grow as well in what were once wheat fields as in the ruined churches where the adders cluster. Spain is a sewer into which drain the impurities of every nation! and you swarm among the rubbish and secure the choicest morsels.

"Oh, Charles the Fifth! in these times of terror and opprobrium, thou who wert a mighty Emperor, why sleepest thou in thy tomb? Arise, and come and see our lord, full of grief and dread, mingling with the royal dead in the vaulted hall below, alone, as thy empire flakes away. Thy arm is needed! Help us, oh, Charles! Spain is dying—Spain is all but extinct! Thy globe which shone in thy deep right hand, a dazzling sun which made the world believe that day began in Madrid, is now a dead orb, gnawed away three parts, and still vanishing. Of the parings, other peoples will make stars that will yet outshine the aurora! Alas, thy inheritance is a prey to hucksters! They have coined thy rays into dollars; thy splendours are sullied by their grime! Oh, giant! canst thou sleep while they vend thy sceptre by the weight? A pack of deformed pigmies snip their jackets out of the regal mantle; and the imperial eagle which, under thy bidding covered the entire world with flame and thunder, is being cooked —a poor plucked fowl—in their infamous caldron!"

In consternation, the ministers had heard him to the end. Only two had finally found courage enough to raise their heads and look angrily at Ruy. These were Camporeal and Priego, who conferred together, and the former wrote at the table on a paper which he made the other countersign. This paper he held out to the Prime Minister, saying—

"My lord Duke, in our joint names, here is tendered resignation of our posts."

Ruy took it coldly, and replied—

"Thanks. You will retire, with your family, you, Count, into your estates in Andalusia; and you, Marquis, into Castile. Begone to-morrow."

The landed property of these high noblemen was held in such enormous tracts that they were "states."

The two nobles bowed and marched forth proudly, with their hats on, a little piece of censure like this having had no effect towards abashing them. Nevertheless, they had no desire to offer battle to the powerful Minister, who had already proved to be of other metal than Eguya, all whose support had been annulled when his patroness, the Queen-mother, died.

While they were mounting horse, and passing under the dark elms among the deserted gorges and sterile plateaux of the Sierra surrounding the Escurial, Ruy Blas was berating the other councillors, without an abatement of his domineering tone, and terminated—

"Whosoever does not like to follow in my road, may go out with those noblemen."

But no one stirred, and none broke the silence succeeding his words as he took the chair at the head of the table beside the royal one, and began unsealing and reading his correspondence. At last, they had a master, not a conniving chairman. This upstart would be great, inevitably, if he were given time enough, and did not lose too much of it in cavilling at microscropic trifles.

But, whether he would be Richelieu, to rule without defeat unto his natural end, or Olivarez, who fell prematurely, these subjugated ministers neither cared nor sought to divine. They communed under their breath while Ruy read on, terrified about their plunderings, and fearful lest their harvest were at an end. They were as hungering seamen on a sinking ship, willing to devour one another to live a little longer.

In her ambush the Queen admired him still who had handled the scourge so unsparingly. They all seemed to cower while he alone stood erect. And yet he was a duke of but yesterday's creation, and his sudden knowledge of the effects and causes of Spain's degradation was marvellous. Was he a wizard who divined, or a sage who was ignorant of nothing? The flash of lightning in his eyes was worthy of the great Emperor whom he had invoked, as one calls an elder brother to one's aid. His voice was what she imagined a King's should be when in wrath. "The King's wrath is as the roaring of a lion"—one of the texts engraven on the walls along which she had passed, recurred to her. This was a lion among the jackals; wolf and glutton had fled in Priego and Camporeal.

All at once she saw Ruy's features move. Two letters had pricked him. One was in a rude hand, and the spelling was as wretched as that of a great noble or a poor peasant. In the extremes, ignorance met its fellow.

"Duke of Olmedo," ran the first, "I am a robber, but I allow no poaching in my province. Someone strange to my confraternity prepares to transport a prisoner over the Sierra, to be held to ransom, I take it. If a rich man or a high dignitary disappear, blame not "MATALOBOS."

The bandit wrote as to a rival captain.

The second epistle was on scented paper, and the hand was delicate and fine as from a fairy queen. He smiled a little to see it, for he was, to the amazement of the Cythereans of Madrid, impervious to Cupid's shafts as never a Premier before.

"Have a care, your Grace! Someone very great in town is to be spirited away. Pray God it is not your Grace! But I said I should make your fortune, and did it. Now, I say, my debt is not acquitted, and you shall enjoy your fortune.

"Your grateful little — not your *little grateful* friend, "LOVISILLO."

This was in Latin, a language common to the jugglers with Court secrets.

"Ha!" thought Ruy, putting the two warnings together as they logically fell, and believing alike the Terror of Galicia and the Sport of the Court. "So I have become already the burden which must be brushed away? But I am not a burr, that the first wind dislodges and rolls down the hill."

Lifting his head, after the resolve that he would not neglect the advice, especially as he had added greatly to the ranks of his adversaries by the

denunciation of the last hour, he turned to the work before him—work always in arrears with these self-seeking ministers. With the same haughtiness, he refused to see the French Ambassador and the Papal Nuncio, both active enemies, under the white flag of their offices. For two hours, the Queen, listening with unflagging interest, and drawing fresh animation, to overcome the tediousness of her standing attitude, from the fire in Ruy's speech and eye felt her admiration and tenderness increase for this undoubted ruler. Meanwhile, the Cabinet, with the factitious energy of schoolboys pretending to compensate for omitted tasks by a spasm of application to new ones, covered the sheets of foolscap with figures and notes. The chaffwax and the enveloper took the letters, which Ruy signed, and completed their decoration with the silk and the seal upon the covers, and, at the same time as the Ministers humbly and gladly left the sombre palace by one door, the messengers, ready waiting, booted and spurred, rode off with the missives to the Capitals of Europe.

The Premier lingered alone, after he had dismissed the clerks, victim of a reverie more profound than ever. Up to this period, he had fought only the habitual foes of the Prime Minister of his era, but now he had sent over among them the great nobles whose appanage by birth it is to prey on the public purse. Other Ministers had often made head, even against such odds, but had always had the King as a buckler if not as a sword. Wolsey had never lost Henry's friendship, or Fouquet Louis', if they had not run counter to them in designs unconnected with the service of the State.

But this King Charles! who believed that "the shaking sickness" was the actual seizure of an evil spirit, who let the sacerdotal conjurers plaster him with written prayers, and administer powdered bones of martyrs, and who acquiesced in their suggestion that he, the victim of a complication of disorders, should kneel for hours on the icy stones before his wife's monument to repeat the prayer—

"May I soon be with thee!"

And all this time the very kingdom from which she came undermined and carried away tracts of his realm wherever they touched.

If Ruy doubted sometimes that he could be, with such far reaching aspiration, a clod, and earthily the offspring of mere dust, he often doubted that this sojourner in the mausoleum could be the descendant of the Goths. A turn of the key in that Pantheon door, and a cast of the key into the palace moat, and Don Carlos would have his only wish gratified—to die among his fathers. His widow would not weep for him, as he had wept for her predecessor, that was sure.

But the King cannot fall—*El Rey no cae!* thought Ruy, as he thrust aside that temptation at the horror of even an invalid gnawing his finger ends in starvation in the crypt there — under the Council chamber—and peering with hollow eyes into the urns in hopes they might contain a drop to alleviate a thirst like Dives'.

"No, the King shall not fall in my time," he said to himself.

The sun was declining when he finished luncheon, eating temperately as became one through whose brain filtered the multitudinous cares, hopes and needs of the State. He stood at the window and gazed on the landscape, where the warm air of the plains rose to war with that which came so chilly from the mountain passes. The ministers and couriers were long since gone, and the servants were in the siestas'

enthralling arms. He seemed to be not the master, but an adventurer who had penetrated an enchanted palace.

Where was the Sleeping Beauty whom these palaces ever contained? and would she be awaiting, her guardian ogre slumbering more soundly than herself, for the arousing kiss of the hero?

The Ilex rippled among the rushes, and its bright and soft murmur came like an amorous song muffled by caution, and formed the burden to the song of a bird in the grove of wild plum climbing half up the hill, behind which the sun was setting under purple curtains.

Suddenly he turned round, for a light step had certainly followed the barely perceptible rustle of the tapestry against the granite wall.

The Sleeping Beauty had not waited to be kissed. She was there, graceful and gracious; her youthful beauty, restored in six months, after a temporary blight from neglect, by a new sensation. Love put the roses in cheeks too often as white and pure as her satin and lace. She smiled with the sweetness and rapture rather of respectful adoration than love.

It was the Queen; she must have been watching, and unseen she had presided, as was her duty, at the important council. Her silence, then, meant consent to his dismissal of the faithless custodians.

"I thank you," said she, "in the name of the State, I thank you!"

"The Queen! you have heard me! Oh, heavens!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CROWNING PRIZE.

"You were right to speak to them as you did," continued Maria Anna, holding out her hand. "My lord, I cannot resist my impulse—my imperative impulse to grasp your strong, sincere and loyal hand."

Walking quickly up to him, she took his hand and pressed it firmly before he could release it. At the clasp, he no longer believed it was an apparition, one of the many that haunted those dark passaages and peopled those large halls after midnight. He had not been able to shun her image, but he had, for half a year, avoided her successfully. And yet, here she was at his side, unexpectedly.

"I listened to you with all my heart and soul," she hastily resumed, for she did not like his silence.

"I suspected——" he began.

"A secret issue? yes, the palace is perforated with mines and countermines, as is the abode of every monarch. But nobody knows about this one; behind that castle on the arras, there is a nailhead where the flag is broidered, and you press it twice to release a spring. It is cunningly arranged, and dates from Don Felipe III. Many times I have

come with the King, to listen to the titled knaves dicing for appointments. He would listen, say nothing, and, faith! do nothing, before hurrying back to the hunting-lodge. But how differently you treated them!" she cried, with great liveliness after the apathy with which she had mentioned her consort. "How can you, whom men knew only as a gallant, a traveller and a young courtier, rise abruptly into such greatness and be so terrifying?"

"Because," was his answer, in a low voice, slowly as if an irresistible power forced him to speak against his will, "because I love you."

"Ah!" but though she drew back a little, it was not far.

"Because upon you must fall all the ruin that they are making, out of greed for themselves and hatred of the spirit which I represent. But my ardour is so profound that nothing can frighten it, and to save you I undertake to save a world! I am an unfortunate man who has no comfort but his real love for you. Alas! as the blind man longs for a glimpse of daylight, so I pant for one look at you. Hear me still, royal lady! In my numberless dreams, your vision is the only one that I wish reality. I was willing though to love you at a distance, in the shadow, and not to try to touch the tip of your little finger, for you dazzled me like an angel appearing in glory.

"Oh, if you only knew how much that gazing on you from afar has made me suffer during these six months! Hiding my flame, I fled. I did not trouble about these vultures and leeches. I loved you; and I let them claw and tear and imbibe. To think that you call it courage for me to beard such reptiles and birds of prey—when I have courage to dare to tell my love face to face with your Majesty!"

Her pride was not offended, and her virtue, diminished by the insufferable weariness of the neglect and tyranny of etiquette, did not resent one word he uttered.

"But let me not talk—let me do something for you!" he went on, drawing encouragement from her silence. "If you were to bid me die in the forefront of battle, I should go and be killed! God knows that, though we fight by intrigue nowadays, here and there Spaniards use the sword still. Forgive me, and send me somewhere to die, like a soldier and a son of Spain."

"Speak—speak on," she murmured, "and delight me. I have never had anyone utter such words to me. I listen with all my previous opinions and all that was taught me overturned. It is of a voice like yours, and eyes like yours, that I have stood in need. You suffer, you say? Tut, tut, 'tis I who suffer! Did you but know, in these six months, while your looks have carefully eluded mine, that I—but, no, I must not too quickly let you know that—well I—I have been unhappy, very unhappy! But I am afraid of my own voice, and my thought unspoken still further alarms me. Let me be silent."

"No, no! Oh, lady, you fill my heart with joy to overflowing," he said, listening to her with enchantment. "Complete your sentence."

She raised her eyes. The sun seemed loth to go, and something like a northern twilight shone where it lingered. A reflection of its ruddiness scintillated among the stars, and was probably Mars, soon to flare red as fire in the sky of superb calmness. Not even an eagle hurried home, and the night-birds, puzzled by this after-glow, still remained in their nests.

The scene conspired with her over-

charged heart, and she persuaded herself that she was bound to tell everything to him who offered to prove the purity of his passion by the sacrifice of his life—a life of which any woman might be proud, since on it depended the splendour and the happiness of an empire. Could it be a crime to divulge her feelings? So much the worse for the state of things which converted frankness and the sentiment into one. When the heart is torn open, all may see what it treasured; and her heart was burst now with the weight of her loneliness, innumerable vexations and ceaseless cares.

"You shunned the Queen, you say?" she commenced, like one reciting a long-prepared speech, not improvising. "Let me tell you that the Queen came seeking you!"

Ah! this was not the first of her visits to the ambuscade. At all these later councils, when her absence had been welcome to the sordid plotters as for him, since all felt the same burden in her presence, though she never interfered—she had been invisibly present. Mute and unsuspected, she had hearkened to what the Premier said, applauding dumbly and treasuring what was wise and patriotic. She had been able at leisure, and uninterruptedly, to study his mind as it projected, judged, and solved problems of magnitude. His voice had interested her in the matter heretofore so dry and dull.

"Duke, it seems to me that you are warrantably the true king! Perchance, you have suspected that the unknown hand that led you up the steps during the year was mine, and you have mounted to the summit. Doubtless, heaven meant to set you there, but a woman led you."

Oh, it was not Don Sallusto who had smoothed the way! This was not the ladder which he had pointed out, and set his foot upon the lowest spar; or, if it were, a woman had always held the upper part. Since it was not to the Marquis that he owed more than the first advance, the only objection which had qualified his gladness was destroyed. He had never been so happy in his life, and he thanked her with an eloquent look.

"Yes," she went on, emboldened by it, "everything that concerns me, I saw, had your attention. The other day, you brought me flowers—now, you offer me a renovated kingdom. I saw that you were kind, and now I see that you are great. Goodness would have captivated any woman: such greatness has made the Queen—not ungrateful, duke!"

If she were doing wrong, why, she asked herself, had she been imprisoned in these tomb-like palaces, like a dove in a shuttered cote against a cold wall in the shadow, where not one golden sunbeam ever ventured?

"One day, when we have time, I will tell you what I have undergone, always by myself, and forgotten. Only last night—but you, who know everything, will already know this—I was, as often, humiliated."

"Alas!"

"Yes; my rooms displeased me. The view out of the window is of walls, lately and incredibly heightened, and adorned with spiked wheels that appear dragged out of the horrid arsenal of the Inquisition. It was my fancy that anywhere else I should not be so miserable as I was there. So I wanted to change it, but under what fetters we queens are held! It was not allowed. I am a slave! and I revolt against such despicable masters!"

He watched her walk up and down along the tableside, with heaving bosom and fluttering nostrils; too gentle to indulge in ravings at her tyrants, she was a living supplication

for him to persevere in the essay to deliver her, and, in so doing, deliver the quaking state and the toiling nation.

Should the woman he loved thus suffer? Should the Queen he adored become a shadow of royalty like her consort? No; for another end heaven had placed him by the throne in the Hall of the Government.

It was he, the poor scholar, whom the Queen had made a duke, and not Don Cæsar, the cloak which had served the momentary purpose of the dismissed Secretary.

"I have told you what was on my mind, incoherently, in my own way," pursued she, looking up and pausing, "and you must see that I am right."

He fell on his knee before her and silently bowed.

"Don Cæsar, I give you my soul," she said, gravely. "Queen as I am for everybody and yourself, I am but a woman. Through the love of my breast, I belong to you, my lord. I have faith in your honour to respect mine. When you call me I shall come, being always ready."

She crossed the room and lifted up the hangings before the secret panel.

"Oh, Cæsar," she said, "your spirit is a sublime one. Your ducal coronet is worn as if you always had it on; be proud of more than that for you wear the crown of genius."

He remained on his knee in adoration. When he had finished his prayer of thanks to heaven, the tapestry had fallen and the figures on it ceased to quiver—she had gone. He flew to the spot, pressed the small knob with a feverish hand, and opened the door of the hidden recess. She was gone. But down the unlighted tunnel, at a distance and rapidly disappearing, something white and diaphanous for an instant gleamed, and he fancied that the sound of a kiss was blown to him. He drew himself back and the door sprang shut with noiseless rapidity. So well and silently are kings served in the dark side of their rule.

He stood, entirely alone this time in the council chamber, long absorbed in beatific contemplation of the image which never left him though the dear original had fled.

Heaven was opened to the poor foundling at last. Of the old life, every vestige had sunk into shadow. This seemed his first hour of all life, as it were in a new world of light. Around him and within him, though he stood in darkness and night had come without, all was gladness, ecstasy and a mystery which ravished him.

Pride and the intoxication of power over millions of gold and men had their enjoyments, but now he felt what most approaches divinity upon the earth—love in all its might and majesty.

"The Queen loves me," he kept repeating, as if he dared not believe it still and must convince himself.

The duchy might fall to a nobleman only, from the hand of a queen, but love was the gift of the woman, and could be for the *man* alone.

"The Queen loves me," he said, as if it were a talisman—the talisman indeed, which had made him happy, conquering, the Prime Minister, with Spain at his feet, as he had fallen at hers.

He possessed her heart. He was more than the King, since it was he whom she loved. This angel whom he had always observed with religious awe, had transfigured him and made him greater than mortal man. He was a poetic soul who walked in a starry dream.

In spite of the darkling shades, he could revive the vision and see again under her little diadem of pearls and silver lace. He remembered that the imperial eagle was chiselled on her gold bracelet when

she gave him her hand, not to kiss, but to clasp.

"Poor angel! she confides in me," he muttered. "Indeed, she may. Ah, if it be true," he mused, looking out upon the deep hollow where, in the indigo sea, all was so calm and reassuring that even the monster world of Saturn showed white and placid, "if it be true that, by a strange prodigy, love comes down to fuse what makes man great with what makes him good, I—who fear nothing in the great To-come since she loves me; who am all powerful thanks to her supreme choice; who have a heart puffed up with more than regal pride—I say she may rely upon my arm as upon my heart. My love is pure and loyal, and the devotion in my core of cores is worthy of it. Fear nothing!"

At that culmination of the charity student's aspirations, he believed that in him Destiny had traced on the shadow, not a mere sketch, but the finished figure of the man for the hour.

While he looked out of the window, another secret entrance—for kings do not preserve the monopoly in their own palaces—opened silently, and a man in a cloak such as horsemen wore to keep off the heat and wind, and cover the rich clothes which might tempt the marauder, crept within the hall. At first he did not see Ruy, not until he was out lined in the vague light of the casement. Slowly approaching him, but without any awe of the dignity which surrounded the favourite of the Sovereign, he clapped his hand familiarly upon his shoulder and, in a second, aroused him from his blissful reverie.

At the same moment he let the cloak fall, and tossed upon the table his silver-laced sombrero; he wore clothes of sulphur colour, trimmed with silver, which was, singular to say, the livery of the Duke of Olmedo.

"Don Sallusto," ejaculated Ruy, recoiling aghast as if a demon had sprung out of a hole in the floor.

CHAPTER XV.

SMOKE SMOTHERS THE FLAMBEAU.

"Good evening," said Don Sallusto, sitting easily on the table edge and using a jaunty voice, without seeming to notice the bewilderment and terror of the other.

"I am lost," muttered he. "The Marquis!"

"I wager that you were not thinking of me," added the ex-Secretary, smiling.

But he had often thought of him, because he believed that his promotions were all due to him like the first one; but since he learned that they came straight from the Queen's initiative, he had dismissed this regretted ally from his intention to reward him in the future if he would not recall him in the present. He was hushed by his surprise. His

misfortune, began again. He had hardly turned towards the angel, before the devil's hand was thrust out of the shade and clutched him anew. But the interloper had entered by this other door, which he had left open; and he would not have met the Queen in the labryinth of the subterranes. He looked tremblingly upon his visitor, unable to collect his disturbed ideas.

"Well, how fares the world with you?" continued the impassible Marquis. "Oh, you are puzzled to see me in the attire of your fellows? I can smile at that, for I only donned it to procure admission into the Escurial. It appears that the Olmedo livery can pass its wearer everywhere. It is tasty; I must compliment the Herald King-at-Arms for devising such a combination. The sulphur is Satanic, but the silver is celestial—Diana's colour."

He put his hat on, but Ruy remained uncovered, in his dismay and his unfading apprehension for his beloved.

"You do not seem well. Have you caught 'the tremors' from the King?"

"I am fearful about you."

"Fear! the laughable word."

"You were exiled."

"Do you believe so? It is possible," said Don Sallusto. "The most absurd things have been done lately in Spain."

He shifted his seat to the chair of the Premier, beside the throne, with no lessening of his exasperating coolness.

"If you were recognized in the daytime in the palace," began Ruy.

"Bah!" with a short laugh. "Happy beings—all courtiers are so—would not lose the time—always too short in recollecting the face of a disgraced brother! besides, what nobleman ever really sees the face of a footman?"

Ruy bit his lip and turned his head from the dim light of the window. The other talked on provokingly, dangling one leg over the arm of the chair, and flipping the dusty leather with a crowquill, having come all the way through the building, it was clear, without being seen by the servants, who would not have allowed the horseman's boots to pass.

"By-the-way, prithee, what's this the town-talk in Madrid? Is it true that, burning with hyperbolical zeal, and for the unremunerating sake of the public Exchequer, you have exiled one of the grandest grandees—Priego? You must have forgotten that you are his cousin, though you would not cozen Dame Treasury together. Why, his mother, like your own, was a Sandoval! You had only to glance at your own blazon—to see the Sandoval Band sable or among the quarterings. Deuce take us! blood relatives do not clapperclaw, my dear lord. Is the wolf to play the good apostle, and make wolves to disgorge? The proper rule is: Each for himself; keep your eyes open for your own lining of your nest, and wink at what others take."

"But, if you will allow me, my lord," began Ruy, slightly encouraged by this singular conversation in the dark, veering round to a fair resemblance to a political discussion, to which he was becoming inured, "the Lord of Priego, as a 'noble of the King,' did the great wrong of trying to aggravate the burdens of Spain. He pressed for an army to be put into the field, and the non-existent funds to be found at any cost. The heir to Bavaria is on the verge of dying, and only yesterday the Count von Harrach, whom you know, of course, told me, in the name of the Emperor, his master, that if the Archduke tries to uphold his right, war must break out——"

Don Sallusto had listened with an air of inattention which grew into

impatience, and pointing, without himself looking, to the small door in the wall which he had left open, but which was concealed usually by a battle-painting, he negligently said—

"The air seems to me somewhat chilly. Just shut that inlet."

Ruy turned horribly pale, but the humiliation was to be borne perforce, however crushing, and his hesitation endured only a moment. Overcoming his shame with an effort, he took his hand off the hilt of the little dagger which ministers carried to cut the silk of letters, but which might cut the thread of life at a pinch, and slowly proceeded to close the door. His tormentor had been so sure of no opposition to his order, that he had scarcely tried to follow him in the darkness with even an indifferent eye.

"If you will mark me, your excellency," resumed Ruy, returning to his place beside the table, and trying to convince his strange interlocutor, "you will see how far from easy is the conduct of a campaign without money. The welfare of Spain depends upon the treasury being kept with all honesty. Yet, for my part, as if our army were quite ready, I bade Harrach tell his Emperor that—that——"

Don Sallusto was looking beyond the speaker on the floor.

"Excuse me, but something white —ah, my own handkerchief; and I fancied that some lady— hem. I have certainly a cold from the freezing air of your Escurial. Would you pick me up that handkerchief?"

Ruy hesitated again. It was only too easy to pin this torturer to the back of the chair in which he lounged; but, after all, he owed him much, and he was repugnant to shed blood where he had been blessed with so much joy. He crossed the room once more and returned with the cambric, which he presented respectfully enough, and Don Sallusto, most carelessly, put it in his pocket.

"Let me see," he said, "you were talking about——"

"About the welfare of Spain," answered Ruy, with an exertion, clearing his throat. "Of Spain at our feet, with the public interest demanding of us forgetfulness of ourselves. A nation always blesses them who liberate. Let us save the people; let us be great and strike down the robbers; sweep the shadow away from the intriguers and tear the mask off the rogues!"

"In the first place," replied the Marquis, easily, "it would not be according to the ways of good society. It smacks of the pedant and the petty genius who tries to make incommensurate ado about nothing. What is there in a few millions of crowns, even golden ones of the pure old coinage, more or less corruptly diverted, to make ugly pother upon? My dear experimentalist, great noblemen are not money-grubbers, but men who live freely when the means come — not off their encumbered estates, but out of the public treasury. I speak without any flourishes.

"A desirable aspect, that of your redressor of abuses—always red with rage and bloated with pride! But I see—you want to be a popular idol, worshipped by the citizens and dealers in woven stuffs. How very amusing it is!" he said, with a forced and irritating laugh. "Pray invent some newer whim. The public interests, indeed! Think of your own, to begin with. The salvation of Spain is a hollow phrase that others have trumpeted, my dear youth, as well as you. Popularity?—the glory bought with copper money! A charming pursuit, to prowl around the custom houses and bark at the thieves! I know far handsomer positions. Virtue, faith, probity, and the other

jinglers on the same string—you will ring the changes upon them to me. They sounded worn out in Charles V.'s time. You are not a fool, but you must be cured of pathos. You are only beginning to pick at the locks when we old craftsmen have emptied the money-box through a fracture in the bottom. Set your bladder of folly afloat, and you will see our swords or our feet burst it, and all the empty verbiage fly down the wind."

"Nevertheless, my lord——"

"Have done!" cried Don Sallusto, with a cold tone that froze the other, despite his enthusiasm; "you are astounding; but we have serious matters at present to occupy us. To-morrow," he continued in a curt and imperious tone, almost such as Ruy, sitting in the same place, had used towards the subjugated Cabinet, "go to the house which I lent to you and wait for my coming all the morning. The event I have been bringing about touches at its completion. Take care that none are there to serve but the two mutes. In the garden, embosomed under the foliage, I will have a carriage ready, horsed, and with all needed stores for a journey. I will take care of the relays of horses, too. Do all to my satisfaction. If you want money, say so, and I will send you some."

"My lord, I shall obey. I consent to do everything," he said, "only, swear to me that in this whole enterprise her Majesty the Queen is not endangered."

Don Sallusto threw down the quill with which he had been playing, and half turned.

"'Sdeath! do you meddle with my business, too?"

In the night, his eyes gleamed luridly, and, remembering the signing of the compact, Ruy more than ever feared that he was entangled with a being more than human. His legs trembled and his knees knocked together, so close to this terrifying man. He seemed to be held by his resistless hand and led towards an invisible but not the less appalling gulf.

"Oh, I catch a glimpse of some monstrous project," he said. "Have pity on me! On me, I say, for I must tell you what, alas! you could not know: I love the Queen!"

The murkiness was not so thick, for the growing starlight had pierced it. Some of the rays found a way into the lofty room, and on the Marquis' bronze visage the young lover saw a sardonic smile. He knew the secret!

"You knew!" ejaculated Ruy, staggering back, amazed.

"Of course *I* knew. But what has that to do with it?" returned Don Sallusto, lowering his swinging foot to the floor and sitting back at ease in the deep chair.

Ruy had retreated as far as the wall, against which he supported himself.

This coward had been making a sport of him, clearly; trying a novel torture upon him. The design was rather what he instinctively suspected, than what Matalobos and the dwarf believed. Don Sallusto was not aiming to abduct the Prime Minister, but the Queen! The King dying—and his death was only a question of weeks, perhaps of days—he could hold her for the price of the next place to the Crown. But the Queen at the beck of this heartless plotter!

"Almighty Power," breathed Ruy, raising his eyes heavenwards; "Thou who puttest me to the rack, spare her!"

"Come, come!" sneered the Marquis, "you have been dreaming; you must have taken matters in earnest, my false Count. What a

joke! I put you on the board, and pushed you forward towards a butt, which I alone could know. But it was all a line of happiness for you, finer than you could think. Keep yourself tranquil and obey! I told you before, but I repeat it: I want to make you happy. Go forward, and the thing is done! After all, a great thing is the chagrin from love! We have all had to go through that ephemeral complaint. Let me tell you that the destiny of an empire is at stake. What is yours beside that?

"I am not unwilling to tell you everything, but you must have the good sense to understand me. Keep in your place! I am kind, very kind, and gentle, but, deuce take it! a lacquey—whether he come of choice or humble clay—is but a vessel out of which I wish to pour at my fancy. Of your class we make anything we like. According to the design moving us, we disguise you or we unmask you at our pleasure. I made a nobleman of you—a fantastic character—for the time being. You are dressed completely for the part, but do not forget that you are my valet. By chance it falls that you are courting the Queen, just as you might be hanging on behind my state coach. Therefore, be reasonable."

Ruy had listened to him without interruption by sign or word, but he had doubted his own hearing in his deep bewilderment.

What had he done? Of what crime of his commission was this the punishment?

"Just and clement God!" he murmured, "Thou art the Father of the fatherless, and Thou canst not desire the despair of Thy humblest son. Yet that is the point to which I am driven, my lord," continued he, in the same accents of piteous pleading. "You have plunged me into this abyss voluntarily, without any wrong-doing on my part, solely to see a poor victim in her death agony. You would crush an unhappy heart, when brimful of love and faith in man, merely to glut your revenge on her. For it is all done in revenge!"

It was vengeance! Who could dispute it? Ruy clearly divined that the abduction was directed to befal the Queen. It was not the King, absorbed in the luxury of hunting and of grieving, who had taken the trouble to banish Don Sallusto. He must have insulted the Queen, perhaps by a suit of his own. The threatened alliance of him to the Indian girl was a pretext. At all events he had been expelled from office and the country, and he had laid all the blame upon the Queen.

But what could her only friend do? Not go and tell her the truth, for then he would become an object of disgust and horror. How could she believe the double-faced cheat, the arch rogue, who could be cudgelled and kicked out of his master's house? The mockery of the knave, who levied contributions on the larder and the wine cellar, and talked sweet nonsense to the Abigail, speechifying against the false public servants who tapped the coffers of the King to gratify Italian vocalists! He never could do it.

In a pause, which the triumphant Marquis did not deign to interrupt, he tried to clear his brain, or else he would have gone mad.

It was still incredible, not so much that events had happened thus, but that there could be such a man as this one—this fiend, rather, who complacently revolved his machination in the befitting darkness. He had invented a rack, and purely to try its powers, he flung in a servant—merely the handiest thing—to set it going and flesh its maiden tooth upon. Suddenly he had seen blood,

fragments of a warm heart, and a crushed head ejected, and the engineer had not so much as started at seeing that the servant was a man.

But, whatever he suffered, there was time for the horrible engine not to be used upon the innocent. The mechanism was not yet in motion.

"My lord," he cried, throwing himself at the feet of Don Sallusto, in his chair, "have pity on me! Mercy on her! You know that I have been a faithful servitor, and you have said so often. See, I submit, but mercy for her!"

"I have no patience with this fellow," observed the Marquis, testily. "He never will understand plain things."

"Mercy!" repeated the desperate man.

"Have done!" cried the other, rising so as to spurn him away, and walking to the other end of the long apartment with the steady foot, and without groping, of one who could see in the dark. "You shut the door I came in by properly, but there is a draught, and—another door behind the arras——"

With the bound of a tiger rushing to defend its mate, Ruy leaped in between the noble and the place where the Queen had disappeared.

"You go too far!" cried he. "At the present hour, I am the Duke of Olmedo, the omnipotent Prime Minister. I rise against the foot that dared to bruise my brow!"

Receding a little when at first the tall figure had thrust itself so fiercely between him and the suspected secret panel, Don Sallusto recovered from the surprise, mixed or not with apprehension. Without taking hold of his dagger, he straightened himself up with an unbroken laugh.

"What does he say? Do you mind repeating that sentence. *Privado* means 'deprived' as well as 'favourite.' Is Ruy Blas the Duke of Olmedo? How can that be? It is true, Love goes blindfolded. It was only upon Bazan that Olmedo has been charged."

"Anyway, I will have you arrested," said Ruy, sternly. "I will tell who you are."

"And I will tell what you are," was the exasperating retort. "Accuse me? A fig! I will risk both heads, for I foresaw this much. You take too soon the air of triumph."

"I shall deny everything!" cried Ruy.

"Go to! you are a child."

"You have no proof," began the other.

"You have no memory," returned the ex-Secretary. "I know what I am saying, and you may believe me. You are the glove—no more, and I am the hand. Still rebellious? Hark ye! if you do not obey me"—here he lowered his voice but fearlessly bent towards the goaded one—"if to-morrow you are not under that roof preparing what I require—if you speak a single word about what is going on—if by your manner or from your eyes you let anything untoward be perceived—the person whom you fear so much about will be, by your own wild adventure, publicly slandered, defamed, ruined in a hundred places! That's the commencement——"

For Ruy had seized the back of a chair with both hands to emit some of his nervous excitement on it, and looked up to brain him with it.

"Then she will receive under cover direct—not *per* the useful Casilda—a paper that I have preserved in a safe place. Do you know what hand it is written in?"

Ruy let his hands fall, and they remained, full of hot blood, but placid, by his side.

"Signed with what signature? If I had it before me now, and a torch held in your hand, I should

not see to read it more clearly: 'I, Ruy Blas, lacquey of——'"

"Enough!" interrupted Ruy, in a faint voice, as if overcome by the struggle; "I will do your lordship's pleasure."

"Resume the farce of governing," said the Marquis, "whilst I leave the palace by the servants' door—as your varlet."

As he had turned and went out by the usual door, Ruy did not offer to intervene.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I will be there; but it will be to save her, though they dash out my brains on the wheel, or swing my soul from the gallows into the undying flames!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE COUNTER-TRICK.

MADDENED, but at the same time stunned, Ruy hastened back to the town in the early hours. To overthrow Don Sallusto's masterpiece of hatred, guile, discord and calamity—one such as skilled politicians revel in—might not be difficult to one who conjoined to aptitude for their great game with live bishops, knights, kings and queens, a nobility and loftiness of which the Sallustos were as incapable of appreciating as of feeling. But the Queen's reputation would be blasted; the Spaniard detests foreign queens set over him, and yet resents a slur upon them far quicker than one on himself.

How could Ruy succeed in seeing her? It was easy and would cost him little to give his blood, heart or soul, as he had said, but would they bribe fate to break up the plot? All the ride he tortured his brain to trace out the labyrinth which that experienced head had constructed. Afraid to seize him when he came out of the shadow, Ruy was unable to catch a sight of him again in the gloom where he had plunged.

Ruy blamed himself severely for having so imperfectly read the man as to beg mercy of him. It was worse than cowardice, it was stupid, towards a spirit utterly wicked. As well have pleaded with a wild beast to release the prey slain and palpitating under the paw as with him to give up his far-reaching intentions regarding the dying King, the disrupted realm and the Queen who had become a weak woman by yielding to love. Love for the lowly, too! for a serving-man!

"But still you must save her!" repeated the Minister, as he wandered about the lonely streets, after leaving his house to the squire's care on reaching the town barrier. "Poor wretch! for I have led to her destruction! My dream is over, and I must buckle to the hard work. I have fallen out of the clouds, from such a height to a lower depth than where I fretted. Lovely dreams are extinguished! sweet visions forever disappear!"

Yet the glamour of power clung to him. Twice he was stopped as he

roved, once by the watch, once by thieves: but each stood off and saluted with the same respect when he disclosed his pale, placid face—the stroll having calmed him. The Duke of Olmedo had not an enemy in Madrid among the classes beneath the Marquis' degree.

He had wandered down a narrow street off the main avenue, where the two rows of high houses leaned over at the top, and, by the compressed darkness, inspired gravity and gloomy repose. To the unthinking, it was morose; to those in Ruy's mood, ominous. It was the street where, next the mansion of the Count of Tormez, the little private house of Finlas and of Ruy rose in the untended garden, mysterious and fit for tragedy. The blinds were closed and the doors hermetically sealed; the windows of the dungeon-like kitchen were covered with strong bars, arched to withstand the wheels of the wine and grain laden carts, for the way was barely wide enough for two such vehicles to pass, hub to hub. Grass grew on the stones of the high wall, and moss and vegetable rust smeared the stones red and green.

Some lights appeared in the mansion, and this fag-end of gaiety caused the *retiro* to look more hideously dilapidated and repellent.

Ruy had a master key, but he did not enter the house; he never liked to meet those Africans whom he believed spies of the spy-in-chief. Their subdued mien was always suspicious to him; he was not one to flatter himself that hypocritical stupidity was preferable to open ferocity. He imagined the one who kept watch sitting by the door in his padded chair, like a watch-dog in his niche, with the visage converted by the pain of the silencing operation into a horrid mask, his huge hands resting on the massive knees and holding a cutlass and a blunderbuss.

"Hackbut and sackbut," thought Ruy, as a musical note came from the Tormez mansion, and, within his house, a clang of falling weapons sounded. "Revelry there, and murder and treason its neighbours."

Opening a small door in the garden wall, he glided into the deserted space. The fountain played, but the pipe was half choked, and instead of the melodious rippling, a melancholy gurgle added to the oppression. Weeds and night blooming plants had overrun the flower-beds and smothered the pretty and wholesome growths. An arbour where Ruy had often withdrawn in earlier visits had partly fallen in. The fay who lodges in ruins, had already trailed creeping plants across the doorway, and, under cover of their screen, hastened to separate the stones with vines and briars, and decorate the steps which she had pushed down in order not to be interrupted. Sitting on the displaced lintel, Ruy contemplated the wreck of natural beauties, the little house of mystery, and the violet tinted sky above it, where one star, of mingled rays, purple, silver, and turquoise, struggled majestically with innumerable flecks of mist, and wore them down like a knight in sheeny armour impassively charging through a horde of pale peasants.

"Yes, she must escape," he decided, looking round warily, for his foeman was master over this place as he was over his life and the Queen's reputation, and none could tell by what door or trap he might not at any moment appear.

Ruy was no longer the reed whipped to and fro by the tempest. His mind, of which he had been so vain until that evening's whirlwind of rage and terror shook it, had recovered from the trouble imparted by the rapidity of events.

On thinking the problem over, he

came to the solution that all depended on the Queen being prevented from leaving the palace of the Buen Retiro. Going even to the Escurial exposed her to being waylaid by bravoes whom Don Sallusto could hire in force, since Matalobos had left his followers in the town. The plot centred upon her being brought out where the traitor could act freely. Apart from this almost self-evident point, Ruy still felt that the gulf extended around him, though he could not see it.

But how was he to debar her from being decoyed out of her comparative safety? He ought not now leave this spot, where Don Sallusto might be momentarily expected. The negroes were not trustworthy. The street was quite deserted, and even in the House of Tormez the festivity had ceased, and, wearied, the last servant had extinguished the last burnt-down taper and was tottering to bed. In vain he looked along its black side, one overhanging turret jutting within the little garden. Not a light flickered, and the many Gothic pinacles and gutter ends, adorned with great carved heads of monsters, were barely visible in the dense shadow.

Whom could he address here, if correspondence were possible? Casilda was, perhaps, trustworthy. But he doubted even her now. Among the maids of honour was, at least, one of Don Sallusto's kinswomen, of his own appointment. No, the women in attendance on the Queen were uncertain.

There was her captain of the guards, however. Don Guritan loved her, for had he not divined the attachment of the young squire and his mistress from such slight clues as the blood-stained lace, the wounded hand, and the swoon in the royal presence? Don Guritan was a loyal gentleman, and he would act as became one for her sake.

Ruy rose quickly.

"I will warn him," he cried.

He drew his tablets and wrote, as well as the darkness allowed, to which he had become accustomed, a line for the Count of Oñate.

"Believe Don Guritan and do as he advises."

But still by what hand could it be conveyed to its destination? The chance passer-by along the garden wall might be the hireling of the Marquis.

"I shall go mad," ejaculated Ruy, investigating the sky, after having questioned the ground uselessly.

"Do not do so mad a thing!" whispered merrily a voice so close to his ear that he started in fright.

He looked around and into the bower, but he was surely by himself.

"Who's there?" he challenged, half drawing his dagger, for he had left his sword attached to the saddle-bow, on becoming the valet of Sallusto again, as far as appearances went.

"Who's where?" maliciously responded the voice in the air. "You should 'look up'—it's good counsel under any circumstances."

Looking up more carefully than before, Ruy finally espied, in the mouth of a Gorgon's head which terminated a water pipe projecting over the arbour from the Count's residence, another head, small, fair and chubby.

"Climb on the pavilion," continued the voice belonging to this little head, "and help me out! It is a tighter fit than I imagined, and never have I sympathized so with rats flying for their life in an untravelled run."

Ruy climbed up the undamaged wall of the summer-house in the steps offered to his foot by the gaps from which stones had fallen, and standing on the roof, easily received the light body of Lovisillo, which,

extricating itself by an effort prodigious in the little man, emerged from the pipe-head like an eel from its skin. In a few minutes they were both on the ground.

"You seem fated to pass a great part of your excellency's life in helping me down from perilous heights," said the King's dwarf, joyously. "Thanks again! This time the predicament is one of my own choosing, and I cannot require any satisfaction as I did when I had the Indian giantess put on bread and onions for a week. The truth is that I am beloved of a certain housemaid in the Count's house—what think you of Alisanda as a mellifluous name? But she is also courted by a savage cook's assistant. After the ball in the servants' hall a quarrel arose, and this brute, arming himself with a knife more brutal than his language, vowed to have my ears. I ran to the vestibule to get my sword, and he followed so close that I took the wrong turning. We raced up stairs, and through interminable corridors until alack! a dark closet allured me. I thought I was in a lumber room, but it was a sort of pigeon-house on the roof. Even here the villain, still thundering outrageous threats, and slapping the broad blade on the doorpost like a veritable ogre, pursued me, and as the leads afforded me no footing for a hand-to-hand encounter, I dived into the only opening available. It was the other end of that gutter out of which you have helped me. Blessings on the genius who orders that man in solitude must confide his secret thoughts to the stars! I recognized your excellency's voice, and——"

"No less than heaven sent you! I thank it," cried Ruy, hurriedly. "This time, it is *your* fortune that is made. You may rely on it that you can leave the Court, and return to end your days in Flanders."

"Halt there! as long as the poor King lives——"

"When you please, then. Now listen, and take this note. It is more than a life—it is honour that hangs by its single line. I will help you over the wall, when you must hasten to the Retiro. See Don Guritan and offer him my excuses, he will know what for, since I cannot receive him here to-day, as I suggested when he returned out of Germany. Add that he must, without any delay whatever, go to her Majesty the Queen and entreat her, in my name as in his own, let whatever be said or done, not to absent herself from the palace for three whole days. Come what come may, mark you, not to go forth! Let him pass this note to her and keep strict watch. He challenged me to a duel, upon which tell him that I was in the wrong, apologize and crave his kind pity, as I am in sore trouble. I will make public excuses to him; but, meanwhile, let him instantly carry my supplication to the Queen that she must believe herself in the utmost peril. She must not go out these three days clear. But I am only repeating myself. Point by point execute this errand faithfully. Be discreet. Let nothing appear."

"My lord, nobody knows half the good I do in the Court—or half the mischief! I am devoted to your excellency. Everybody says you are a kind master."

"Have you fully understood?"

"Yes, my lord."

Ruy ran with him to the wall, which had no spikes upon it, and held him up so that he clambered upon the coping and sat down with both legs on the other side.

"Not a soul in the street?"

"Not a soul—not even my savage cook. I promise you I will do your bidding, and I never eat my words—though, the chance rising, I will

eat yours rather than let hostile eyes read it."

"That's my brave, true Lovisillo," as the King says. *Adios!*"

"*A Dios de Amor!* Love shield thee!" rejoined the dwarf, hanging down by his arms and letting himself drop to the ground, where Ruy heard his little feet patter as he ran away.

Left alone, Ruy felt that this happy relief in his embarrassment had further contributed to his growing calmness. Nevertheless, he still saw things that he had forgotten return confusedly. He used his *passe-partout* once more and entered the little house. All was in order; the furniture was dusted and the keys stood in the sideboards and buffets. The mutes were asleep, one at the hall door, the other, no doubt, in his room under the roof. He walked into the small but sumptuously furnished sitting room, where a large silver hanging-lamp, which might have been taken from a church treasury, burned perfumed oil over a round, gilded table in one corner.

The general effect was dispiriting, for the gilding was tarnished into a coppery red, and the hangings, rugs and upholstery, in frayed crimson velvet, had long since lost all vividness of tint. The room was made to seem high by broad bands of gold striping them vertically at intervals. Opposite a very large sculptured fireplace of the time of Philip II., where an iron shield of arms gleamed over dead ashes, a small low door gave access to a little closet without other issue—the place for a hidden secretary to take down the answers of an interrogated prisoner, of a spy to watch, or of a musketeer, with his finger on the trigger and the muzzle of his firelock at the keyhole, to shoot the dialoguist who might draw a dagger on a private judge. Architects made provision for such side rooms in the Spain of the Don Sallustos.

The solitary window had not only heavy iron bars, but a wood-casing outside to prevent shot from the street below, as in a castle or prison.

The old portraits on the walls were half effaced by smoke of torches, which had covered the Venice glass over the wardrobe chest with a milky film. Tall arm-chairs surrounded a large heavy writing-table.

"All is quiet, very quiet. I really have no reason for alarm. All is going well. Lovisillo is wary and agile as the oryx, and will deliver my message. Don Guritan is trusty when there is a question of my beloved. Lord be thanked, if I may bless Thee for letting that note be transmitted, and aiding me to protect that angel and discomfiting Sallusto She is saved, then! She need not fear, and will have nothing to suffer, while I can cheerfully die."

He drew from his bosom a small phial, set in a filagree silver case. In his age they took poison as the Greeks drank hemlock or the Romans fell on their swords. Yet he recoiled from the death of a coward, as if he were but expiating a crime. To die in this abode of intrigue—alone, vile, and miserable, with his livery as his loathsome shroud? No!

All at once, a sharp and distressing thought shot through him, but left a rankling behind.

Gudiel, the old adherent of the Marquis in all his schemes, where was he? Usually, he hovered in the house, or about it, and if anyone had stopped the dwarf it would be he, hiding at the end of the alley.

Rapidly, Ruy descended through the house and aroused the negro. In pantomime he questioned him, and ascertained that Gudiel had been there overnight, and had seen to the lighting of the lamp, and that a long disused gate at the end of the garden

should be put in order for the entrance of a carriage. Gudiel was now in the street, and there was the danger. Ruy snatched a sword from the trophy on the wall and darted out of the doorway. A dead man in the streets of Madrid was not an uncommon find for the scavengers, and one more murder laid to the footpads would not much increase the charges they bore laughingly already.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BLACK SHEEP.

The Bazan family had readily pacified itself for the painful blow inflicted by the dismissal of Don Sallusto, on seeing the rapid elevation of the other branch in the contemned Don Cæsar. How differently the black sheep was regarded as soon as he wore the Golden Fleece! At length, Prime Minister and Duke of Olmedo, the favourite with the King and Queen—a double protection seldom enjoyed by Secretaries of State—he had conquered a far higher position than he would have occupied, though he had not dissipated his inheritance among roisterers.

But how about the real Don Cæsar, on whom disaster had fallen through the initiative of his cousin, so that he rose to the surface after a while like a dog plunged into the river, blinded and bewildered.

When carried out of the palace by the alguazils, he had trusted to hailing his friends the robbers in the street, but, for once in a way, not one Matalobosian was basking in the sun, and even the sturdy beggar looked listlessly at the familiar sight of a ragged gentleman haled to prison. Uninterruptedly, therefore, the plan of the Secretary was carried out.

He was embarked on a royal ship, and taken upon the Mediterranean, where he was handed over to the Barbary corsairs, for what he protested to be insultingly insufficient value received. His life in Tunis was that of the Christian captive, without any of the halo which time and poetry have lent it, so often described in the eighteenth century. Thanks to a constitution hardened by privations, he resisted the bastinadoes, and enlisted, to have a chance of escape, on a pirate ship, when a sound drubbing by the French had reduced the fleet.

On landing in Spain, after capture by his countrymen, he had been put in the galleys, as "Zafari." But soon he was removed from the rowing boats becoming obsolete, and set to labour on the royal highway. At an arranged hour the gang broke their chain and the heads of a keeper or two. After peregrinations in different directions—for all roads did not lead to Madrid, if they did to Rome—he reached the capital.

Alas! Matalobos was in the Sierra; a new *régime* had begun to cleanse the town of his associates with the proverbial restlessness of a new broom, and, on the night when his "double" came to the little house in the Alley of the House of Tormez, Don Cæsar, the genuine, had not a friend, a corner, or a crust. Afraid that the very same alguazils who had hustled him out of the town might recognize him, he rambled the street, seeking consolation.

In this mood, famished and athirst, which is worse—a man is more dangerous to accost than a wolf.

He had plunged into the alley, when a cloaked figure rose out of the shadow and challenged, roughly—

"Where are you going?"

"My way, man!" returned Don Cæsar, who had procured a sword worthy to replace his old Excalibur, at the cost of many a meal dispensed with, and who clapped his hands on its hilt and sheath to draw it like lightning.

"Then, make it another way, man! My master does not want his road a nest of night birds."

"Your master is a knave, and you are a fit mate to wear his harness."

"My master, dog, is the Marquis of Finlas, and——"

"Draw your sword, then! I have a grudge against him, and am delighted to begin with his turnspit before teaching him a lesson of courtesy."

In a twinkling Gudiel, for this was he, crossed swords with the adventurer; but the retainer was a mere child opposed to a fencer skilled in all the wiles and artifices of a man who always fought for his own life, and the long blade pierced him through and through, and when withdrawn, left a dying man in the gutter in the centre of the alley. The victor calmly wiped the steel on the fallen cap of the corpse, and strode off a little way, to listen and look round.

In the side-doorway of a large house, which shaded the spot, a man peeped out, carrying a large knife. It was the cook, spying for his dwarfish rival who so mysteriously disappeared when he hunted him up on the roof.

"Saint Gabriel, first to carry sword, protect me!" muttered Don Cæsar. "The street is full of people of my lord of Finlas. So, he dwells there, does he? In a palace! Oh, that I may turn the tables on him and see him in the kennel like his myrmidons."

He glided along the wall of the little house, and, still pursued by his fears, he hastened to turn at the end. Here, just beyond the corner, a travelling carriage was waiting, the horses, four in number, munching out of nosebags, and two men asleep, leaning against one another, upon the capacious box. A gate in the wall was ajar. Not to be seen by these men, if they awakened at his step, he pressed into the recess of the gate, and it gave way at his light touch. In an instant he had fallen within it at the opening; well oiled, it closed quickly, a spring snapped, and there he was, imprisoned in the garden.

"Ha! I am safe here for a breathing spell," muttered he, for the men on the coach had not interrupted their regular breathing. "Joy! it's a deserted garden, and there's not a glimmer in that house to which it belongs. It is one of those whose masters quit Madrid for the South in the autumn, and the housekeeper, locking up, trots about from wineshop to wineshop. As for the carriage—humph! it smacks of the kidnapping of a pretty girl! Faith of my fathers! if it be out of the house of my sour-faced cousin, I will lend the abductors my very best assistance. Meanwhile, I will lay me down in this high grass, and count the sheep and lambs in the sky where Diana's herdsmen blink their innumerable eyes, and—dash it all—I am hungry! What a pang! and thirsty! Sleep is out of the question. Rather than rest, let me ascertain if the larder has been left unfastened, and there is a loaf in the bread-hutch. Burglary after a homicide is the meet feather in the red cap."

But the house was strong and well defended; Don Cæsar had not the masterkey of his countertype, or the picklock of his new trade. Door and window defied him; but by

standing upon the trellis which sustained a straggling Isabella grape-vine, he was helped to look down into an orifice which, judging by the sooty smell, led to the kitchen.

He might have drawn back if left alone to reflect, but at the same moment the gate creaked, and he imagined that he had been closely followed.

"*Aut Cæsar!*" he muttered, and slid, feet first, into this tunnel. "And, *facilis descens*—'ugh! it is black as Hades!"

Almost instantly, half-choked with fine wood ashes, he arrived, with a jolt to stop him abruptly that made his soundest tooth ache, on the hearth of the wide chimney-place in the sitting-room which Ruy had but recently quitted in his useless search for Gudiel.

Breathless, stunned, and shocked, he stared around with an expression both delighted and alarmed, on his refuge. Rising, shaking himself, and rubbing his shins, he stepped out of the fireplace and picked up his tattered beaver, which had accompanied him in the descent. There was nobody there, and the solitude was comforting.

He took a mournful glance in the Venetian mirror at the injury done his already dilapidated mantle, and the vest—alas! a mere ghost of the sartorial masterpiece which the Count of Alba had, perhaps, never ceased lamenting—patched, slit, and hacked about. Through all his tribulations, he had cherished it as the last keepsake of happy days.

"Anything catable?" he queried of the silence. "A lamp burning is a sign that the house is not untenanted, as I thought."

In the drawers of the buffet which he attacked were only some clothes. One garment that came under his bold fingers was the gold-embroidered green mantle which Ruy Blas had been originally given by Don Sallusto.

"A fair exchange is no robbery," he said, carefully drawing forth the cloak and even more carefully replacing it with his own, folded up. "This is better."

He walked up and down, draped in the mantle, and trying the effect in various styles of adjustment.

"Ha, my dear coz, so you sent me into Africa where man is the mouse of that big cat called the lion! But I am going to be monstrously avenged on you, as soon as I have had some breakfast."

He had determined to go to the Marquis, of whose disgrace and exile he had not heard a word—not having entered a circle of the Court as yet—and, under his real name, show himself, attended by the "tail" of frightful ragamuffins redolent of the prison taint a league away; on him, too, he would set his creditors, who were in the second generation by this time. In a corner stood a pair of lace-top boots, infinitely superior to his battered shoes.

"Boots," he said joyfully; "and two that make a pair, in which respect my foot gear was faulty. One of them," he mused, while putting on the boots, which fitted tolerably, "I found on the remains of a muleteer in the Precipice of Ginguela, and the other was given me by a one-legged fresh-water sailor, who had a pair bestowed upon him. These pinch a little, but one must not look a gift *boot* in the mouth. What a well provided house, though I came into it at the gullet, almost like wine into a bottle. Talking of wine, wine is good, and that resembles a wine closet."

Alas! it was that cupboard without light where he could find nothing even by groping, and he backed out disconsolately. Instead of being pleased at the escape from the watch

or the confederates of the retainer whom he killed, here he was, yawning and fretting because a feast was not offered to him.

"Ungrateful dog that I am!" he said, sitting down, but soon springing up again. "Now, there's a bookcase, and I—who have read the works of Nature alone since long—might drink solace from—it's a churchman who lives here, by all that's potable! I smell the psalter!"

The bookcase was a pantry: a pasty, six wine-bottles in a row, and a platter of sweetmeats offered a good appetiser if not a feast.

"I will read me a chapter out of this admirable sonnet by the famous poet called 'Old Sol'" he chuckled.

He drew the cork with a practised hand, and drank without the intervention of a glass.

"Xeres Los-Caballeros has nothing more delicious," he said, and he hastened to finish the flask before bringing all the array out upon the little round table, at which he sat and began to oscillate between pie and wine with commendable regularity. "If the master of the house drops in, I will ask him to partake—if I leave any, and he does not have me driven out. Let me put it away the quicker!" and he ate larger mouthfuls even than at the start of this Homeric repast. "I wonder who lives here! the pie is too hearty for a canon! too substantial for a lover! and yet—it's one of those merry bachelors who keep a snack and a cup for a boon companion who may drop in. I am a good fellow, and I have dropped in. After all, what harm am I doing here, except to the pie? what do I claim but the hospitality of a luckier fellow-being in the antique manner, I embrace the altar!" and he would have hugged the blessed table but that the act might endanger the equilibrium of the still full bottles, and his own.

"The wine was too good to be that of a bad man," he reasoned, continuing to drink freely.

"Besides, I shall give my title, and will not that play the deuce with my cursed cousin! What a mighty surprise for Madrid to learn that the ragged, barefoot Zafari is Don Cæsar of Bazan, next of kin to the Secretary of State. When did he come back? they will say. In the night—this morning! What uproar everywhere on seeing this bombshell suddenly fall, and Don Cæsar hurled out of the middle! The man whom nobody of consequence saw or heard of for so long that they thought he was no more. Well, ladies and gentlemen," he proceeded, addressing the bottles, "he is very much alive and lively. I can hear men saying, 'the deuce!' and the girls, 'the more the merrier!' What a pity the cheers of sweet welcome will be dashed with the howling of three hundred creditors."

Everything had come to him in this series of windfalls but money.

"Hark!" he cried, for at last he heard sounds in the passage.

They were coming to expel him, but dressing himself in the borrowed toga, he prepared to fall like Cæsar. The door at the end of the apartment opened, and a footman in livery entered and came forward with a large, rounded leather bag on his broad shoulders. Muffling himself up to the eyes, Don Cæsar boldly stared at the intruder, and demanded—

"Whom have you come here after, my friend?" for in the pinch of danger he had always plenty of coolness.

"Don Cæsar of Bazan," was the astounding answer, as the man gladly laid the bag on the large table.

"Then it is I," replied the other, lowering the useless mantle, though wondering at the response.

"You are Señor Don Cæsar?"

"Of Bazan—decidedly! I have the honour to be the real, true, sole Cæsar, Count of Garo——"

"Will your lordship deign to verify the accounts," said this agreeable footman, pointing to the label on the sack.

"Money, by all that is bright!" muttered the beggar-nobleman, but attracted towards the bullion. "This is really too much!"

"Deign to reckon," repeated the lacquey; "this is the sum I was ordered to carry to you."

"To be sure, I remember the little matter," faltered Don Cæsar, gravely.

The adventure, if not spoilt by his evil spirit, would be admirable. Cash came most opportunely.

"Did you want a receipt?"

The man shook his head.

"Whom am I obliged to?"

The man smiled slily.

"But, of course, I can guess."

"I was to say that it came from one who knows you to do what you know."

"Of course," and Don Cæsar did his best to appear satisfied with this lucid explanation. "Everybody concerned is to be very reserved. Hush."

Don Cæsar laid his finger across his lips, and for an instant they looked at one another like augurs.

"It's a magnificent phrase: it comes from—I have not a book in my library more enlightening. It is perfectly clear. Besides, I never make any to-do when there is money to receive. Plague on it! I shall commit no indiscretion, believe me!"

"Will you kindly count it, my lord," persisted the servant.

"For what do you take me, sirrah?" cried he indignantly. "Oh, the lovely round paunch," he continued, patting the firm bag. "I can trust a faithful fellow like you."

"The gold, my lord, is in sovereigns, good quadruples, weighing full, or Mint-stamped doubloons; the silver in Maria-cross pieces."

On opening the bag Don Casær could draw out to his growing admiration several purses of gold and silver, which he speedily opened. He set ravenously to filling his pockets with the gleaming coin. His fairy tale was dying prettily upon a gold and silver couch. All this time the lacquey watched him with marvellous impassibility, thus proving he was brought up in no less good a school than Don Sallusto's service. The other, who could not find pockets enough, had gone on to using the secret pouches in the funnel-tops of his boots.

Suddenly, remembering that he had a witness to this exhibition of greed, he looked hard at him, upon which the man easily said—

"I am awaiting my lord's orders!"

"What about?" asked Cæsar, testily, for the occupation was too gladdening to make interruption welcome.

"The very great matter which your lordship knows, while I do not; let me be told what I am to execute quickly."

"Oh, there is something, public and private," answered the Don. "Faithful steward, I love thee!" he added, patting him on the shoulder. "Thou could'st bear away the mines of Potosi in one gigantic ingot. Meanwhile ——"

"My master gives me to you for help, in order that there shall be no delay."

It was a lusty, imprudent, bold-faced, liquorish-lipped, roguish-eyed strapper, a man after Zafari's own standard of a man.

"This is acting finely. What a learned priest—disfrocked for losing his spectacles on a fast day, and mistaking venison for carp—of my acquaintance styled 'congruously.' Let us do what my friend desires,

though," he thought; "they may hang me if I know! Come hither, and before anything else, drink that for bearing me so surely this golden cargo, thou estimable galleon!" he added, offering the lacquey a half-emptied bottle. "It is Oropeso wine, and tuns superior to any spirit its noble grower shows. I know, for this is a bottle of the same."

The eyes of both kindled, as Don Cæsar, weighed down by the gold, stretched himself in the chair, with his bruised leg upon another, and his tongue loosened, set to moralizing.

"Man, my dear friend," he said, "is merely a column of smoke, which issues from the fire of the passions. In the open air it is a nuisance, but in a chimney it dances round merrily, as we men, in a snug nook, are joyful. Drink away! there's a fresh bottle. Man, look ye! is but lead. All your doubloons are not worth the song of the passing drunkard. Drink, yet be sparing," he went on, with sudden mysteriousness. "If you load the cart too heavily the spring breaks. The wall, without a good foundation, crumbles; hence my laying two-thirds of this pie to rest, before taking to the Xeres." Rising and staggering, he found that the cloak weighed heavily about the neck, for which the tailor had not shaped it. "My dear! adjust this mantle at the collar."

But the lacquey proudly drew himself away, saying—

"Señor, I am not a valet-de-chambre!" and stretching his hand over the poor emptied bags, he rang a hand-bell on the table.

Don Cæsar recoiled at the ringing, for he fully believed that this would bring the master in person, and he would be caught, lined with gold. But it was only one of the blackamoors who responded to the bell, and on receiving transmissal of the order from the high-spirited menial, who would not step outside his department, he chased Don Cæsar into a corner, so to say, and arranged the mantle. He allowed it to be done, stupefied, and was still staring after this extraordinary dumb apparition had bowed and left the room. The lacquey had paid no attention, and far from being petrified like him, resumed the tacitly-settled contest between them to consume the liquor evenly, though the host had a start.

"I am the guest of Beelzebub," reflected Don Cæsar. "They say that one must do good with his money, or lose one's soul. Shall I build a syna—I mean, a church? Those Jews have so often harassed me that I cannot get them out of my head now I have money! A church, or a playhouse, or yet—suppose I pay my creditors!"

It is but justice to say in haste that this was an idea which passed as soon as conceived. And though, as an emendation to so preposterous a conception, he proposed, at least, to indulge them with a little payment on account, he repented rapidly of watering such weeds.

"Fie! It's that villainous Oropeso which is softening my brain," he moaned. "I must counteract it with some Fronteria."

But the footman, who had no weakness for monologues, had gone on drinking, and he was at the last bottle. He reeled and held on to the back of a chair with the hand not engaged in making the voyage and return between table and empurpled lips.

"As I have corrupted this honest fellow with the grape-juice, so has money corrupted me—nothing like it to lead a man, though he were lineal descendant of the Hannibal who took Rome, to absorb mercenary sentiments up to the apple in the

throat. What would people say if I paid what I owe?"

"Did you speak, señor? what were your orders," hiccupped the servant.

"Let me meditate, while you finish the last drop."

Before the sixth bottle was laid on its side, Don Cæsar was struck with some luminous ideas. Beaming, he returned from staggering up and down to the table where the footman looked at him owlishly.

"Straighten yourself," said he, "and listen to what is to be done. Fill your pockets with the pieces!" and as the lacquey's hands trembled, he assisted to load him. "In the Flower Girls' alley, at the end of the the Calle Mayor, there is a Number Nine, a narrow house, but still keeps a bold front, except the crystal windows, which have been mended with oiled paper."

"A tumble-down house," said the footman, lurching, but steadied by the other.

"Nay, but rickety. You may cripple yourself in climbing the stairs, so be careful."

"A ladder, is it?"

"Something of the sort, only with more holes in it, and larger ones. On the top story dwells a charming creature, easy to recognize by her home-made laced cap set one-sided on her long flowing curls—slightly red! Stay—*erratum!* the long flowing curls may be short now, for I have a fear that she may have spent her summer holiday in prison—well, well, long curls or short, bear yourself respectfully towards her, my dear boy, for she was my light gazelle in dancing days. When I met her in Rome, she was famous for having danced the fandango before the Pope. In honour of her indigo eye, count her down one hundred ducats in my cherished name. Next Number Nine, in the stall where he is a cobbler, you will find a fat rogue with a ruddy nose, who pulls an old seedy black felt hat down to his bristling brows, scrubby as the worn plumes. He is the progeny of a left-hand queen of an Emperor of Galilee, one of my old friends, deceased, and his rapier always stands beside his bench. Clap six piasters on his lapstone in my name, and do not let him stay you to throw dice double or quits for them. Farther on, in the hole hot and black as an oven, you will hear songs that proclaim it the Tavern of the ballad singers. On the threshold will lounge a regular customer, smoking and drinking. He is a gentle fellow of elegant life, a noble scion from whom no bad language ever falls—he's the friend of my heart and his pet name among his rare circle of choice spirits in Goula-tromba—apt epithet, inasmuch as he rejoiceth in a gullet like a trombone. Give him thirty crowns, and tell him he is to show all the gratitude I exact, by drinking them, and he shall have more when they have melted into the roseate empyrean! Bestow on all his crew the silver and do not be shocked by the way they will open their eyes.

"Next?"

"Keep the rest," said Cæsar, loftily. "The last chapter is—— get you drunk, knave! smash the crocks, cut your capers noisily, and do not hie you home until the morrow, as late in the night as you can make it."

"Enough, my prince," gasped the fuddled man, proceeding towards the egress in zigzags and marking his errant course with dropped coins like the pebbles of Hop-o'-my-Thumb in the woods.

"He is dreadfully inebriated," faltered Cæsar, propping himself up by the table. "This will never do, boy," he cried, following him to the door. "Do honour to the good liquor by your countenance, learn to

carry it off—hic!—with a noble air. Virtue of the saints! if by chance the money oozes out, as here, let it fall—and if the scholars, beggars and scum seek to pick it up, let them collect! Do not be a mortal of too fierce a mien, but be indulgent. They are men like your own self. 'Moreover,' as the preacher saith, in this world, chokeful of saddening transactions, you must sometimes scatter a little pleasure among your fellow creatures. These clods ground down by Fortune's wheel, will one day come to be hanged—therefore, show them the kindness which is their due! Begone!"

The lacquey stumbled out, and for a time, in melancholy, Don Cæsar listened to him blundering down the stairs to the house door, where the African on duty helped him out. Alas! for Zafari's friends, the wine in the head of his messenger became too strong when the night air surrounded him. He had not proceeded farther than where the dead body of Gudiel still lay in the gutter, when he fell over him in one of his absurd strides, and measured his length beside him; there he reposed. Half an hour afterwards, the watch heard his snoring, and, venturing down the alley that far, carried the two off to the watch-house. The coins fell out to the last piece on the journey, and if in the end the tavern received them, they did not directly rejoice the old comrades of Zafari.

Unconscious of this perversion of his boons, he sat at the table, on which he leaned his elbows, and sank into reflection, deep for him.

"It is the duty of the wise to make good use of money when he has any. There is the wherewithal here to live a week. If then there should be any left, I will employ it for pious purposes. But I am not so sure about the surplus going so, for it may be taken from me. There is some mistake under this godsend, and that blundering fellow has hit upon the wrong person."

Finishing the heel-taps, but not stooping so low as to touch the fragment of the pasty, he had gone as far as the door in order to attempt a flight, when once again there were steps on the landing, and he retreated.

Into the room there came, with many curtsies which did not portend anything terrible, an old hag with grey hair, and in the black basque body and mantilla of a duenna. She was old enough and ugly enough to be the fairy godmother who figures in such adventures, thought the startled man, staring at her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HEART AND THE SWORD.

"Don Cæsar of Bazan," inquired the old woman, pausing at the door, and glancing with her sharp eyes at the scene of devastation presented by the pie-dish and overturned bottles on the table.

"Eh! a female! the housekeeper, for a hundred," he exclaimed, watching her in stupefaction, as she made a profound salutation. "I am glad that it is not the devil I expected, in Don Sallusto. A duenna, only an old witch. Yes, I am Don Cæsar. May I know with what design——"

"Señor, I salute you, this day of fasting," with an involuntary look again at the tokens of the feast.

"Is it? hem! usually old women are forerunners of the young, and a merry sequel often follows a devout commencement. Yes, it is passover bread, and mineral water from Aix —our Great Emperor's cure-all——"

"Lord maintain you in health," said the duenna. Then, in a mysterious tone, she added: "Did you not make an appointment with a certain person who sends me for to-night in secret?"

"I am highly capable of it," came his fatuous answer.

Without letting him take it from her, she held out a small folded note.

"In that case, my discreet gallant, it is really you who sent this note to the lady who loves you—and whom you very well know?"

"I daresay it is I."

"Good," said the professional go-between. "No doubt the dame is blessed with a growling father, or guardian, or elder brother, and is obliged to take precautions. I have not seen much of her, though I, Dame Oliva, am very well known for my honour in these acts of intermediation, but her maid has told me to verify the note, and she has let slip a thing or two. That is quite enough, without mentioning names."

"Except mine," observed Don Cæsar, with exaggerated slyness.

"The matter is simplicity's self," continued the duenna. "A lady receives an appointment from the friend of her soul, but fears to fall into some trap, though too many cooks spoil the broth, as my Book of Emblems neatly says. In brief, I have been sent to have confirmation from your own lips."

"What a tumult the old prude makes over a love epistle," cried Don Cæsar, impatient to get out of this house of surprises. "Yes, I tell you I am the man."

"In that case," she returned, laying the note on the table near where the ink dish stood, "write 'come' upon the back of the paper, but not in your usual hand, lest it be compromising."

"Not in my hand?" said Don Cæsar; "that is easily done," and he scrawled with his left hand on the paper, with a delighted grimace. "By my patron! this recalls the time when my name was begged to back stamped paper. *Ay de mi!* It is the Count who is at a discount now."

"Good! You will see her this evening. Pretty, I suppose, for her veil——"

"Of course, she would be veiled. Charming!" said the gentleman, almost convinced that he spoke from a certain knowledge.

"The maid knows a trick or two, though a foreigner, with a complexion such as I never before saw on woman;

a laughing devil's eye set in copper! but as knowing in amorous correspondence as our native camereras. I kiss your hand."

"Wait for the palm oil for your own," said he, giving her a handful of coin, which she pocketed and hastened to retire, for fear he would discover that he had mixed gold with the silver.

But her haste did not prevent her making another low curtsy, or to whisper her name again, and that she was to be found "sitting at the third column on the right as you enter the San Isidro Church."

As the door closed on her, Don Cæsar rubbed his eyes, resolved no longer to be astonished at anything. He was dwelling in the moon, not on earth, where such things had not happened for years to him. But it was all too fine, and this time he rushed to the door to escape the end of so much unexpected bliss. When he opened it, a tall, gaunt figure, with white mustachios, grimly blocked up the passage, and, as he recoiled, thunderstricken, it strode into the centre of the room. To add to the fright which Don Cæsar did not dissemble, this formidable successor of the courier of love carried a pair of extremely long fighting swords under one arm. It was the Count of Oñate. He appeared puzzled as much as Don Cæsar, and looked around wistfully, and then disappointed after a second glance at him. The host would have expressed more surprise and less unconcern at a stranger's presence.

"Is Don Cæsar of Bazan here?" said Don Guritan, questioningly, and fiercely turning up his mustachios, which had begun to droop in the night air.

The adventure was becoming more romantic than even the foretastes presaged. A good dinner, a fortune, a love tryst, and now a combat. This reinstated Don Cæsar on his ancient footing, and he gaily greeted the old Count. On his part, the latter met the warm advances coldly and uneasily and drew himself up rigidly, like one who suspected a practical joke was in operation. But Don Cæsar was not the man to joke with the wearer of a sword.

"You have come to the right destination," he hastened to assure him. "Pray take a seat, without any hesitation, as if you were at home. I am enchanted to see you, for I have not, at the present, any idea what they are doing in Madrid. Let us chat of the charming place, where I still fancied Matalobos robbed purses and Lindamira stole hearts—but faith! I fear that there is more urgent peril in the belle than the bravo. Oh, woman, woman, my master! My head is cracked on their side, and the little plagues enchain me. Speak," he ran on, with the loquacity due to the wine, and which the duenna's visit had somewhat checked, "lead my wit into the proper channel. I am no more a human being, but an absurd ghost returned from the everlasting pilgrimage. I am a hidalgo of Old Castile, who has been plucked, despoiled to my very gloves. I arrive from afar—the fantastic countries in the South."

"And I, too, but from the North, and it has made me furious"—stamping his foot and refusing the chair offered him.

"I am enraged myself!"

"I have covered over a thousand leagues," continued Don Guritan.

"And I, two thousand! I have seen women of all complexions but white, which is reserved for walls and mosques. In Algiers, happy city; and amiable Tunis, where the bakers and grocers, for little juggleries with short weights and small loaves are nailed by the ears to their doors. Benighted Turks, thus to encourage trade!"

"I have been tricked, señor!" roared Don Guritan.

"And I, sold," returned Cæsar, in the same key.

"I was the same as exiled!"

"And I all but impaled!"

"Let me tell you how they serve the captain of the Queen's Lifeguards! they sent me all the way to Neuburg, in a cunning manner, with a box containing these few words: 'Keep this old fool as long as you can bear him!'"

"The best I ever heard," said Don Cæsar, with a laugh worthy of his younger days. "Who devised the jest?"

"Don Cæsar of Bazan, whose neck I have come to twist!" replied the Count, dropping the swords on the large table, making the lamp swing and the ink leap in the dish.

"Indeed!" said the other, suddenly turning grave.

He had played many pranks, but the accusation of having done so on the captain of the Queen's guards, the ex-Ambassador and Viceroy, sobered him, and he listened to the outburst of vexation without a word.

"To cap the audacity," said Don Guritan, "he sent to me—just think?—sent a puppet—a doll—a dwarf—the King's little pet—the smallest man in the world! It augmented the atrocity still more, for he was the least of apology-bearers that could be found. I would have put him in my old helmet for a dungeon if it were not for his standing with his Majesty! But I come to his master—this Don Cæsar—an impudent traitor! Let me see him, that I may run him through!"

"I am Don Cæsar!"

"What!"

"Do you doubt my word?" cried the adventurer, passing from the phase amorous and genial to the phase quarrelsome.

"You can drop that strain," returned the old Count. "Though you may believe it droll, I say you only annoy me by your jest."

"But you amuse me mightily," said Don Cæsar; "you wear the air of the green-eyed monster in an Italian opera. I am enormously sorry for you, for the evil from our own vices cuts more keenly than that evil we do to others. I assure you that I would rather be poor than a miser, and to be loved falsely than not be loved at all. It seems to me that you are rich and deceived. Out with it! Is the lady I am to meet your wife!"

"Wife? Do you think I would lash myself up into this diabolical humour, which will bring on a fit of the gout, for my wife?"

"Your ward, then? Make a handsome dower to the poor girl, and on my sword, if she be noble, I will marry her."

"Marry her? she has a husband."

"And you, a married man, set yourself up as her champion. For shame, old man, who should be repenting in a monastery! If you are not defending your ward or your wife, how dare you burst in here with your bundle of bodkins and the air of a weeping tiger? You have no right to be so ridiculous."

"Señor, you exasperate me!"

"Señor, you have exasperated me!"

"You shall pay me for this insult—we must fight."

"Really?" said the emotionless Don Cæsar.

"You are not Cæsar, but you have insulted me, and I will begin with you."

"Mind that I do not end with you."

"Enough. This by-street is deserted."

"Is it? Then you, too, are a stranger in this neighbourhood. I found it too thickly peopled," observed the alguazil-persecuted Zafari.

"There let us fight!"

"Very well. But your choice of ground is not of good omen. I have already left one pesterer there for dead. But come along with your packet of steel. 'Fore St. Jago, we shall look like a master armourer and his oldest hand carting samples.

The negro at the door, whom all these goings and comings had confused, seemed to hesitate about letting Don Cæsar go forth, whom he had not seen come in; but he was physically incapable of questioning him, and the long swords daunted him. The two gentlemen brushed by and emerged into the alley. The dead and the drunken man had been transported elsewhere, and the cook had gone to bed after watching sadly from behind the closed door the transfer of the coin from the footman to the archers. He was sleeping as soundly as may be expected when one has seen a fortune slip by.

"This will do," said Don Guritan, stepping upon the patch where the shadow of Tormez House ended and the starlight fell. "Don Cæsar I'll kill after you."

"Indeed! Let me defy you to kill Don Cæsar after me."

Since the opponent insisted on his taking one of the matched pair of weapons, he retained his sword in the sheath, and the two stood before one another armed to the old Count's satisfaction. Not so the encounter. Fortified with a good repast, buckler'ed by gold in every pocket, and with the prospect of bright eyes to sparkle on him, Don Cæsar would have been victorious if his antagonist were less old and more vigorous. At the third pass, he ran in under his warded-off rapier, and, shortening his own like a dagger, drove it through his lean throat.

"It is a trick I learnt of the corsairs, and all the good they let me pick up," remarked Don Cæsar, as he took away his left arm from around the fainting man and lowered him to the ground.

Then, dragging him to the wall, he set him up against it.

"Old fool, you brought this on by your own pertinacity," he said. "If a prayer from the doorkeeper of the Brothers of San—— Bah! he is dead! These old men have so little blood that a scratch is mortal."

For a moment he stood irresolute.

"They will say that I am turning this street into my private graveyard," he muttered, with a grim smile. "Plague on it! he is in the way of my belladonna, so near the door. Hist! some one is at the mouth of this alley! The watch? Well, let them pick him up and be rewarded."

Sprinkling a few coins about the Count's body, he hurried back into the house where, to put an end to any hesitation, he saw a person in a long cloak, who had approached from the other end of the street, swiftly disappear.

"By my faith! it is she—the lovely one! Neck or nothing, I will follow the sex into the infernal jaws."

And rushing again past the negro, and still spying the person mounting the stairs within, he cried after, as he ascended two at a time—

"Here I am, my dear!"

What was the mutual amazement of the stranger and Don Cæsar, when they met on the threshold of the room in the beams of the lamp, to recognize in each the cousin!

"Cæsar!"

"Sallusto!"

The first to overcome his emotion, the younger man advanced, and drove the Marquis step by step before him within the room. He closed the door, set his back to it, and, folding his arms, said, triumphantly—

"I have marred your scheme!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DAW IN THE PEACOCK'S FEATHERS.

THE Marquis had not needed this startling intrusion to add to his perturbation, for he had been unable to comprehend the negro warder's signs, and the absence of Gudiel deprived him of the only interpreter. He had hastened here in trepidation, for his spies had informed him that a countermine was certainly preparing, and he heard from his kinswoman-in-attendance on the Queen that her guards-captain had received some important message. The absence, too, of Ruy Blas, contrary to his order, was menacing, as was the presence of Don Cæsar.

"Yes," said the latter, making the more noise, as he did not wish notice taken and remarks passed upon his inroad on the pasty and the wine, "you are weaving some ingenious web, which, like the bee bounding upon the spider, I have broken. I doubt that one of the threads remains intact, I have so reared and plunged among them. It rejoices me!"

What had he done?

"Your fellow with the bag of coin," went on the rogue, laughing loudly, "who came on the business —you know—ha! ha! ha! I made him drunk, and sent the pieces round as a free gift to my numerous friends. *I* am not without true, disinterested friends!" he concluded, majestically.

"Was all lost?" wondered the Marquis. "You are wrong to suspect me," he began, but a laugh checked his oily excuses.

"Never fear! I filled my own pockets first, though, as you may be sure. As for the lady——" (here Don Sallusto's anxiety showed through the mask of suavity and coaxing)—"who sent me a frightful duenna with a blossom nose and mustachios——"

"Why should a duenna be sent?" questioned the Marquis, perplexed.

"Through prudence, to learn on the quiet if it was really Don Cæsar who expected her here to night."

"What did you answer?" asked the other, eagerly.

"I have a mind not to tell you; but you know me, my master. I said, 'Yes,' that I awaited her."

If the duenna did not know the false Don Cæsar by sight and saw this original in his present dress, she would make a misleading story for her employer; in this case all might not be lost.

"Lastly, your bravo, your tilter, your master-of-fence, Don Guritan, the Count of Oñate, who would not receive a messenger of my lord, Don Cæsar—curse his pride! and would foist a single combat upon me as a man waiting for his lady love—I have settled him. He lies under the wall, just beyond your door, with another of your *sbirri*."

"The Count of Oñate dead? There will be a hue and cry over this."

"And you will be in trouble. They will say you egged your spendthrift cousin to kill him, so as not to pay some loss at cards."

Instead of being clouded, Don Sallusto's brow brightened. The blunderer had disarranged nothing. The loss of the money was a trifle

to the ex-Secretary of State, who had purloined largely and laid up his store for his grand plans. The worthless Cæsar had even been an auxiliary in a rough way. Still, since he would not help him, for he remembered how energetic had been his former refusal, and he dared not trust him, he hastened to be disembarrassed of him.

"Your tale is odd," he said, with restored calm; "have you seen no other persons?"

"No; but I shall see more. I am glad to continue in this road. Do not be alarmed—I mean, be very deeply alarmed. I have come to stay and raise a dreadful tumult. I mean to explode my name over every part of the town. I will hire knaves to shout it out—to wear it on their backs——"

"Enough! keep the money," said the ex-Minister, "but leave the house."

"So that your bullies may beset me? I know your mode," answered the younger cousin. "Death, or another voyage on the azure Middle Sea! Not so, my kinsman."

Sallusto suffered the penalty of not deserving credit anywhere.

"Besides, I feel aware that somebody is the object of your treachery in this den of hatching plots. Every Court intrigue is a pair of steps, up one side of which mounts the victim, pale, troubled and pinioned, whilst the other holds up the executioner. That is you, of course. Now, I have kicked the ladder from under you, and down you come!"

"Upon my honour!"

"So I am going to remain in the web to spoil everything. I know, my coz, that you are rather strong-headed, and subtle enough to manage several puppets on your string, and I am one of them. I am going to stay suspended, but in dancing, 'ware that I do not kick your shins."

"Now, hear me."

"Hear you, a rhetorician?—you who made them sell me to the African pirates? — who fabricate sham Cæsars here?—who compromise my name?"

"That was a mere chance."

"Chance," repeated the other, hotly, "chance is a dish that knaves set out for fools to eat. There is no such thing as chance. It serves you rightly if your plans are upset, but I mean to save those you would have ruined here. I shall proclaim my name from the housetops."

Dragging a chair under the window, he opened it and wrenched away the wooden guard without, which fell with a crash of its rotten boards upon the street. A little group of the watch was clustered around the Count of Oñate, who, perhaps, was being revived.

"Good! I spy some alguazils," cried Cæsar, exultingly. "They are looking up. Halloa!" he shouted, "come up here at once! You are wanted."

The Marquis stood a prey to the greatest perplexity, for he was, in fact, without power, and he could hardly escape if Don Cæsar published his title, and led to the singular discovery that there was a rival to the Duke of Olmedo.

There was a scuffle at the street door, but the negro, though reinforced with his brother, was unable to cope with the officers of justice. They forced their way in, and two or three alguazils followed their principal, an Alcade, into the room where so many visitors had converted it almost into a thoroughfare, with a bustle which Don Cæsar liked.

The latter, for once, met the police with cordiality, and, with an air of triumph, said—

"You will set down in your report that——"

"That this," interjected Don Sal-

lusto, quickly, as he stepped forward and pointed to his cousin, "is Zafari, the accomplice of the famous robber, Matalobos. He acts for him in town whilst that villain takes shelter in the mountains. Seize him!"

Before Cæsar could draw the sword already of such service, two alguazils seized his arms.

"I—I a robber? I am—I am your valet!" faltered he, in a muddle.

"Which of ye called me in?" demanded the Magistrate.

"I!" answered the Marquis, firmly.

"What a brazen liar!" muttered Don Cæsar. "No; to tell the truth, I am Don Cæsar of Bazan in person."

It was the turn of the police to look surprised. This the dread Prime Minister? And they commenced to smile.

"Don Cæsar!" repeated the ex-Secretary. "Look at the cloak he has stolen from that wardrobe—mine."

Indeed, "Sallusto" was written under the collar-tab, and the Alcade regarded Cæsar more than suspiciously, so that he saw that his case was lost.

"Why the very doublet that he wears," proceeded the Marquis, emboldened by his gain, "was taken from my friend, the Count of Alba. Look at his coat-of-arms on the left sleeve!"

"He's a wizard!" groaned the unfortunate friend of Matalobos, making an essay to break loose, and succeeding only in tearing the rose vest, and forcing several coins out of his overladen pockets.

"Is that the way honest folk carry their money?" added Don Sallusto, as the alguazils stooped to pick up the gold.

Their appetite whetted by these few feathers, they turned to a thorough examination of their prize. Not only was there a mint upon his person, but a perfect library of love letters, all addressed to the Count of Alba. Don Cæsar's love for amorous correspondence had finally destroyed him.

"Again," said the Alcade, ominously, "the Count of Oñate has been found dangerously wounded in the alley ——"

"I feared so," said Don Sallusto, shaking his head, "the poor old gentleman! the Queen's captain, and endeared to her. This scoundrel must have assassinated him——"

"A duel!" cried Don Cæsar.

"There is blood on your sword hilt," remarked the Alcade; and, more sternly, "Enough; silence! away with him."

"Good evening, Zafari!" cried Don Sallusto, blandly, as he followed the procession down the stairs to the house door.

"Do not laugh too soon," returned the prisoner; "Don Cæsar may have no friends, but Zafari will have revengers!"

CHAPTER XX.

THE TIGER AND THE LION.

Still uneasy, Don Sallusto again inquired for Gudiel, and hastened to go to the lock-up to see if there was news of him, and if Don Cæsar would be imprisoned. Gudiel was dead, for he saw his body, and the Magistrate had recognized the comrade of Matalobos.

In the meantime, the little house and the alley were shrouded in the stillness and darkness deepest at the hour before the false dawn. Ruy, who had completed his investigation of the neighbourhood, and gone as far as the Retiro, where all was quiet, returned with a fatal resolution on his mind.

Lovisillo had, no doubt, transmitted his message to the guards captain, and the Queen would not come out of her rooms. Since the world, as embodied in Don Sallusto, would not let them love in peace, he would chose his own death, and die with the consolation that nobody could know their secret.

Regaining the room where he had almost hoped to find his pitiless master, and perhaps come to blows, under which he would expire, he looked again at the tiny phial of poison—the only remedy to his grief at his fall, and the enforced end to his love.

He was resigned, he thought, for her sake—yet the misery was intense of accepting the fate of seeing his beloved no more. The angel had fled whose hand he had pressed and whose lips had sanctified his own. Where the savour of their honey still dwelt, he was to pour the venom and die in despair.

"I shall see her never again," he moaned; "I shall hear her no more!" and he lifted the bottle to his mouth.

Stay! hark! Was not that her own step on the stairs?—a step which had always made his heart thrill. Was it possible? He sprang to the door, and, as it opened, a female figure in a long hooded cloak, like that of the Sisters of the Rosary, glided in. The cowl dropped and the cloak flew back with the swiftness of her movement to fall into his arms.

"The Queen!"

It was the Queen, in a white dress, and her face was as pale. He released himself and receded with a shudder of fright and hastened to close the door.

Spite of all his precautions, she had been decoyed into the trap. His exclamation of horror, and his act of repulsion, surprised her, and she looked round in the fear that they were not alone in the room where the sombre air was not encouraging.

"Who induced you to come here?" he stammered, putting away with trembling hand the phial of poison.

"Why, you! I received your note."

"A note from me?" queried he, amazed.

"Written in your dear hand," she said.

He could have brained himself with rage and bewilderment against the wall, for he was sure that he had written nothing to her in all his loving frenzy. When she held out to him a letter, and he read in the

waning lamplight what he had written, months before, at the instigation of Don Sallusto, beginning "A terrible danger," and addressed to "my Queen,"—he was aghast at the foresight of the arch-traitor.

"Oh, the monstrous villain," he uttered hoarsely.

Recovering his powers at the emergency, he pushed her gently towards the door, and urged her to go.

"What have I done?" she remonstrated.

"Destroyed yourself," he said, in a broken voice. "I cannot explain; I can only entreat you to flee!"

"I took the precaution to send a stranger, a duenna, to make sure, and she said you wrote 'Come,' as the confirmation of——"

"Indeed? Alas! but go! Every instant I feel your life is ebbing like a pierced heart's blood! Go!"

"Stay! I understand," for a sudden inspiration seized her from the devoted nature of her love.

This was a precarious moment, and he wished to avert from her the dangers which environed him.

"I shall remain," she answered, stopping at the entrance.

Remain, at such an hour and in such a place?

"The divine goodness joins in my prayer," he said, wringing his hands in a renewal of despair. "Flee! you have been taken in a snare, poor child! on all sides the flames of hell rise to consume you! Can I find no plea to move you much as I love you? As I love you, go! Yet, would they let you out? Who opened the door?"

"It was so dark; but it seemed to me that the men were not all black—one wore a mask."

"Ah! Satan's self! Was he tall?—was he?—but there may be another issue. I always suspected that behind that bookcase—wait till I barricade this door."

He swept the things off the large table, and lifting it up as if he had a giant's strength, he set it down at the door, and jammed its edge under the carvings of the panel so that it could not be opened from the other side. This done, he rushed to the mock bookcase which Don Cæsar had rifled. He was right in his surmise, for at the first desperate wrench the whole moved towards him with its back, part of the wainscot on hidden hinges. It was a doorway this disclosed: a black hole yawned.

"I know not whither it leads, but we will attempt it," said he, going across the room to unhook the lamp.

But a shriek from the Queen stopped him, and made him turn sharply at half-way. In the orifice stood a man in a black mantle and a black mask. It was Don Sallusto, and it was too late for flight.

Slowly the Marquis removed the crape and showed his countenance, wreathed with joyous smiles.

"The Princess Palatine is no longer Queen of Spain," said he, "and for ever she is doomed to be the companion of this man," he added, pointing to Ruy, who hung his head in desperation.

On recognizing the enemy whom she had banished, Maria Anna doubted no longer that she had indeed been lured into a trap of death or disgrace.

"I hold you in my grasp," went on Don Sallusto, with an effort at a preternatural calmness; yet he could not mask his excessive joy. "But I wish to address your Majesty without any anger, and with no intention to displease. I am a Spanish nobleman, who has found your Majesty alone at midnight in a private dwelling. Let us make no scandal. This is enough in a Queen to have the marriage annulled at

Rome. The Holy Father will be informed promptly of it, but with his consent the cause of the divorce shall be kept secret."

In Ruy's heedless clearing of the table the ink and pens had been scattered, but the Marquis picked up one and dipped its point in the pool which the well waxed floor refused to absorb. He had a parchment ready written, and he held it out with the pen.

"Sign me this letter to his Majesty the King, and I will have it handed by the Chief Squire to the Notario Mayor. At the end of the garden, to which this outlet leads, a carriage is waiting, with gold in plenty in the pouch. The coachman and footman will take your orders. Go, both of you, at once. I will aid you throughout your journey. Without being disquieted, you may proceed *viâ* Toledo and Alcantara into Portugal. The sea will open invitingly before you. Go where you like, it is all one to us. We will shut our eyes. Obey! I swear to you that I alone know of this adventure. Waver, refuse, and Madrid will know all this morning. Do not chafe and fume, for, I repeat, you are in my grasp."

The Queen sank into a chair, overcome, for she acknowledged that she was in her enemy's power. But a faint smile had appeared upon Ruy's bloodless face when he heard the victor affirm that the secret was also entirely his. His quietude suited the latter's purpose, for he nodded patronizingly to him, and, holding out the pen and parchment, said—

"Quite right, my friend; I am working in your behalf, too. After all,"—addressing the Queen—"what is a crown to a woman brought up domestically, as is the wont with you Germans? If you lose the throne, you gain happiness. This is just a little matter of business between us three. Sign, or you must steal from the scandal into the cloister!" he said, and thrust the pen between her cold and unresisting fingers. "He loves you, and he is worthy of you. On my honour, he springs from a truly great line—almost princely. You made him Duke of Olmedo, but he was a Bazan and grandee of Spain, having his castle and——"

"Liar!" cried the silent bystander, dashing the quill and the scroll from the Queen's hands. "I am Ruy Blas, and I am but a lacquey! Do not sign!"

It was time he spoke, else he had suffocated.

"What do you say, Don Cæsar?" she faltered, incredulously.

He showed that he was in a suit of livery and without sword belt.

"I tell you that I am named Ruy Blas, and I am that man's valet. Señor, I say farther that there has been enough treachery here, and I do not want happiness on your terms. It was a waste of time for you to tempt me, who could ascend to power of myself and maintain myself there, if God had willed it. But I am justly punished for accepting a block of rotten stone on which to step. It is high time that I revealed my true self and burst the bonds of your hideous plot. I shall go no farther in your company, for we are too ill-suited. I wear the coat of a lacquey, but you have a menial's soul!"

"In truth," said Don Sallusto, as if not hearing the rebuke, "this man is my lacquey. Silence, sirrah!"

"Just Heaven!" moaned the Queen, above all hurt in her pride, wringing her hands in despair.

"But he has spoken too soon," said the Marquis. "However, now let us say the whole, it so little matters, for my vengeance is complete." Facing the downcast Queen and ignoring Ruy with the superlative

contempt he had always shown for him and his class, he thundered, "What will be thought of you? On my faith, the town will laugh! So you dismissed me, and I dethrone you! You banished me, and I drive you out of the kingdom! You offered your dependent to me as bride, and I give you my footman for your paramour! It is true that you can soon marry him, for the King is at death's door; but your heart will be his only riches, and your hand can no longer sign his patent as Duke! After all, you will have the best of it," he involuntarily concluded, as he ground his teeth, "for, though you trampled me under your foot, you will dwell in peace and love."

While he was venting his pent up rage and vindictiveness, Ruy had made the circuit of the room and closed the secret door. There was no egress but the window, and that was barred; nevertheless, he removed the chair left under it by Don Cæsar, then, coming up stealthily behind the speaker without being suspected, far less perceived, he clutched the handle of his sword projecting beyond the cape, which it lifted up, and swiftly plucked it out of its sheath.

The startled Marquis turned his eyes, filled with hateful joy, from the prostrated Queen and beheld the young man standing before him with the bared sword in the air, like a statue of the archangel with the flaming blade. He drew back, appalled, but with one step Ruy again held it over him, and cried, in a terrifying voice—

"Meseems, you are insulting the Queen!"

Disarmed, convinced by the tone that the dog would obey his master no more since he had maddened him, Don Sallusto darted to the secret door; the other he had noticed was barred by the heavy table, but this, too, was closed and bolted.

"Save yourself the trouble of trying to escape me," continued Ruy, tauntingly, for indignation made him ignoble at last; "so far Satan has protected you, but, by the Lord that liveth, none but he appearing can tear you from my hands—and he must fight for it! My turn has come, and men crush serpents wherever they meet them! No one can enter—and I hold you beneath my iron heel. Lady, this man spoke insolently to you, but I will explain. He is a soulless monster, who laughed yesterday at me when he was bruising my heart to gratify himself. He, a dismissed servant of the State, ordered me about as a servant, when I was the Prime Minister of Spain; I stooped to entreat him—I bowed down to his feet, for your sake. Marquis, you detailed your grievances and I forbore to answer them; you merited your fate for robbing your country and debasing her in the pleased eyes of her rivals. You brought her low, and I cannot pity you in your congenial dust. But, wretch that you are, you dared insult a woman in her adorer's presence. You befoul the idol when her chief worshipper was by her side! Truly, you amaze me, if you call yourself a man of brains. Did you imagine that I would listen to that and do nothing? Hearken: whatever be the sphere of a traitor—a tortuous trickster who commits unparalleled and monstrous misdeeds to wound and brand his country, nobly born or lowly, any son of that land has the right to seize a weapon—the peer's sword, the cottager's spade, or the headsman's axe, and strike him down. Lady, I was a lacquey—now I am 'the Gentleman of Madrid'—the royal executioner!"

And, resting one foot on a chair which resembled the block, he un-

consciously assumed the attitude of the deathsman, sword in hand, awaiting the culprit's head to be laid in the hollow niche.

"Would you kill the man?" tremulously pleaded the Queen, affected by the forlorn expression on the pallid countenance of her enemy.

"Lady, this matter must come to an end here and now," responded Ruy.

"Mercy for him!"

"For the first time, I refuse a request of yours," said Ruy, firmly. "I regret I must perform my holy function in your presence; but close your eyes and pray for him—though, I fear, it is an irredeemable soul."

Don Sallusto had surveyed the walls with a hopeless eye, for there was no trophy of arms as an ornament anywhere; his own precaution against a prisoner resisting him had turned against himself.

"This is murder," he said. "If I had a weapon!"

"Marquis, you are jesting," sneered Ruy Blas. "You said I was no gentleman. A duel with one of your domestics, who wears your colours—a dog who may be whipped and shut out in the cold! but a dog who may bite and kill. Yes, my lord, I am going to kill you like the infamous coward that you are."

"Mercy! mercy!" screamed the kneeling Queen, as the two men crossed the room, Ruy mercilessly pursuing the other.

"Lady, this is a devil whom no angel can save!"

"Then let us perish and go down among the devils for ever!" yelled the Marquis, suddenly unhooking the lamp and darting into the spy's closet, where he hoped to kindle the refuse papers into a blaze. But the revenger was too close on his heels, and entered almost at the same time. He turned to dash the burning oil in his face, but an iron hand grasped his right wrist, and held the lamp steadily in air, while his own sword was thrust in at the apex of the arch of the ribs and penetrated his heart. Leaving the weapon in the deathwound, the conqueror detached the lamp from the closing hand, and returned into the room. The little door closed with a snap and stifled the death-gurgle.

The Queen, frozen into the immobility of a statue by horror and awed by the indomitable resolve of her lover, saw him victoriously return, pale and without the sword, and comprehended that her enemy was no more to be feared. Ruy approached her with an unsteady step, dropped on one knee with great respect, and without raising his eyes to hers, said, in a low, grave voice—

"Lady, I am not as guilty as you believe. As you see, I am aware that my deceit must appear dreadful to you. My defence is not easy to make. Yet I have not a vile soul, and I am honourable at the base. It was my love that made me stoop to any means to win a place near your height. I do not defend that step, for I know I ought to have invented a better way. But the fault was committed, and anyway, I loved you thoroughly. Have no fear," he continued, still kneeling, though he looked up and it was she who avoided his gaze, "I am not going to approach your Majesty while I tell all. I did my best to prevent this interview, and I have been patrolling the streets and watching the palace till I felt sure you would not come out. I returned here, full of relief at your escaping, though my heart was broken."

"What is your wish?" she murmured.

"Your pardon," he answered, clasping his hands.

"Never," she said, rising.

He also sprang to his feet.

"Never?" he questioned.

"Never, no, never," she repeated, but less and less firmly.

He was already exhausted by the passion that had shot out its fiercest ray when he slew Don Sallusto, and it was almost gladly that he now drained the little phial of its drug. His back was towards her, but she divined the meaning of the action, for she flew to him and asked him what he had done. He flung the bottle from him and replied—

"Nothing. My woes are over. You may curse me, but I shall always bless you for the one happiness in my dreary life. At least, you once loved me."

"What have you done?" she again demanded, for his voice sounded unnatural and he reeled. "Tell me—answer me—what was that philtre? Speak! I forgive you, and I love you still. Cæsar, I believe you."

"I am Ruy Blas."

"I forgive you, Ruy," she said, winding her arms around him, for his eyes were misty, and he groped for support. "What have you taken? Speak, I entreat. Nay, I order you. That hateful liquor was not poison, say!"

"It was not poison; it was gladness, and it fills my heart." He held her to him, and, raising his eyes, prayed for the divine benediction on this consoler of his wounded heart, living only in her love and dying unrepiningly in her mercy.

"Poison!" she gasped; "then it is I who have killed you! Heavens, when I loved you so! If I had forgiven you sooner——"

"I should have done it all the same, for it was not right that I should live. Fare thee well. Flee from here by that secret way; the waiting coach will transport you to the palace. All will remain secret, for death has sealed my lips and those of the only witness."

His voice died away, and his spirit exhaled in his kiss. It was a lifeless body that she lowered to the floor. She was not allowed the pleasure of mourning over him. The voice of the night watchman vibrated in the dawn—

"Half-past three, and a serene morning!"

Serene! She shuddered at the mockery, loosened her embrace, and, implanting a kiss on the noble brow of the first Minister who had tried to rule Spain for the good of the people, hurried out by the door and passage into the garden.

EPILOGUE.

The next day the Queen listened eagerly to the gossip amongst her maids. Never before had such a stock of material for chatter been served up at the table of Madrid. The Count of Oñate had been nearly killed by the lieutenant of Matalobos, one Zafari, but had nobly averred that it was in fair duel, and the vagabond had been simply expelled from the town to join his captain. It is needless to say that Justice no more returned him his money than it did the Count of Alba's love-letters and worn-out vest.

In an obscure house from whence the two dumb negro servants had fled, were found the dead bodies of Don Sallusto and his faithful valet named Ruy Blas. Another, Gudiel, had been picked up in the street at the door, slain, like his master, by the long sword. Ruy had been poisoned, for the bottle was discovered. The *Gazeta* plainly stated that the Africans had prepared some wine or a pasty, nearly consumed, and so drugged their master and his man, ere coming in to finish them. They had taken a large sum of money, which a footman swore to have delivered there overnight. The Africans were sought for, but such rarities as perfectly silent servants were highly esteemed; and it is probable that their new employer changed their coats, and took good care that they should not betray themselves by enjoying frequent holidays out of his house.

Another marvel was the absence of the Prime Minister; but a letter came from him shortly from his new domains of Olmedo. He had resigned his office, and entreated Ayuga to forgive him for superseding him. The politicians praised this masterstroke, for the King was on his deathbed at last, dying before the year 1700 closed. His will made the King of France his heir. So perished the line of Charles V.

The Queen, the depth and sincerity of whose grief none could doubt, retired to Toledo, with Casilda, and the also inconsolable Lovisillo; and, after living in exile at Bayonne during the War of the Austrian Succession, ended her days of sorrow at Guadalaxarra, in 1740. Not a breath of slander tainted the peaceful seclusion of her long widowhood. She never loved again. It will be said that History has not recorded the love of Ruy Blas—what matters that? History is not a microscope.

THE END.

DALZIEL BROTHERS, CAMDEN PRESS, LONDON, N.W.

LIGHT *versus* DARKNESS.

"SHAKESPEARE, the Greatest Genius who has ever yet lived," taught the **Divineness** of **Forgiveness,** of **Perpetual Mercy,** of **Constant Patience,** of **Endless Peace,** of Perpetual Gentleness. If you can show me one who knew things better than this man, show him!! **I know him not!!** If he had appeared as a **Divine,** they would have **Burned Him;** as a **Politician,** they would have **Beheaded Him;** but God made him a **Player.**

"He Taught that Kindness is Nobler than Revenge!!"
—The Rev. George Dawson, M.A.

"Earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The Deeds of Mercy."—*Shakespeare.*

What higher aim can man attain
Than conquest over human pain?

JEOPARDY OF LIFE,
THE GREAT DANGER OF DELAY.

**You can change the trickling stream,
but not the Raging Torrent.**

WHAT EVERYBODY SHOULD READ.

How important it is to every individual to have at hand some simple, effective, and palatable remedy, such as ENO'S "FRUIT SALT," to check disease at the onset!!! For this is the time. With very little trouble you can change the course of the trickling mountain stream, but not the rolling river. It will defy all your tiny efforts. I feel I cannot sufficiently impress this important information upon all Householders, Ship Captains, or Europeans generally, who are visiting or residing in any hot or foreign climate. Whenever a change is contemplated, likely to disturb the condition of health, let ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" be your companion, for under any circumstances its use is beneficial, and never can do harm. When you feel out of sorts, yet unable to say why, frequently without any warning you are suddenly seized with lassitude, disinclination for bodily or mental exertion, loss of appetite, sickness, pain in the forehead, dull aching of back and limbs, coldness of the surface, and often shivering, &c., &c., then your whole body is out of order, the spirit of danger has been kindled, but you do not know where it may end; it is a real necessity to have a simple remedy at hand. The Pilot can so steer and direct as to bring the ship into safety, but he cannot quell the raging storm. The common idea when not feeling well is: "I will wait and see: perhaps I shall be better to-morrow;" whereas, had a supply of ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" been at hand, and use made of it at the onset, all calamitous results might have been avoided. What dashes to the earth so many hopes, breaks so many sweet alliances, blasts so many auspicious enterprises, as untimely death?

"I used my 'FRUIT SALT' in my last severe attack of fever, and I have every reason to say I believe it saved my life.—J. C. ENO."

CAUTION.—Examine each Bottle, and see that the Capsule is marked "ENO'S FRUIT SALT." Without it you have been imposed on by a worthless imitation.

SOLD BY ALL CHEMISTS. PREPARED ONLY AT

ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" WORKS, LONDON, S.E., BY J. C. ENO'S PATENT.

A CURE FOR SICK HEADACHE, SLUGGISH ACTION OF THE LIVER, SUPPRESSED GOUT, DISORDERED STOMACH AND BILIOUS ATTACKS, &c.—SIMPLE AND UNIQUE.—A Gentleman writes:—"Dec. 27, 1887.—After twelve months' experience of the value of the **'VEGETABLE MOTO'** I unhesitatingly recommend their use in preference to any other medicine, more particularly in bilious attacks; their action is so gentle, and yet so effective, that nothing equals them in my opinion. They have never failed to give the wished-for relief. I take them at any hour, and frequently in conjunction with a small glass of ENO'S 'FRUIT SALT.'—Yours gratefully, ONE WHO KNOWS."

ENO'S "VEGETABLE MOTO," of all Chemists, price 1s. 1½d.; post-free, 1s. 3d.

ENO'S "FRUIT SALT" WORKS, POMEROY ST., NEW CROSS RD., LONDON, S.E.

The Habit of Health.

CIVILIZATION by Soap is only skin-deep directly; but indirectly there is no limit to it.

If we think of soap as a means of cleanliness only, even then **PEARS' SOAP** is a matter of course. It is the only soap that is all soap and nothing but soap—no free fat nor free alkali in it.

But what does cleanliness lead to? It leads to a wholesome body and mind; to clean thoughts; to the habit of health; to manly and womanly beauty.

PEARS' SOAP has to do with the wrinkles of age—we are forming them now. If life is a pleasure, the wrinkles will take a cheerful turn when they come; if a burden, a sad one. The soap that frees us from humors and pimples brings a lifeful of happiness. Wrinkles will come; let us give them the cheerful turn.

Virtue and wisdom and beauty are only the habit of happiness.

CIVILIZATION by soap, pure soap, **PEARS' SOAP**, that has no alkali in it—nothing but soap—is more than skin-deep.

PRINTED BY DALZIEL BROTHERS, CAMDEN PRESS, LONDON, N.W.